

information, contextual detail, sociological insights, and tantalizing suggestions for further work, in a broad human setting often missed even in works of pastoral theology.

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WRITING GOD AND THE SELF: SAMUEL BECKETT AND C. S. LEWIS. By Sharon Jebb. Eugene, Ore.: Pickwick, 2011. Pp. x + 281. \$32.

Jebb uses psychology, theology, and mysticism to examine the importance of the self and its relationship to God in the letters and novels of Samuel Beckett and the essays and fiction of C. S. Lewis, two mid-20th-century thinkers who are rarely associated with each other. She makes a clear case that Beckett, in his *Three Novels* (1951–1953), dramatized the diminishment of the self in isolation from a personal God. In contrast, C. S. Lewis affirms in his essays and in his final novel, *Till We Have Faces* (1956), the importance of the God-self relationship, especially the Christian God with a special relationship to the individual conscious and loving self.

Although some critics have tried to bring Beckett into the camp of novelists with an implicit apophatic theology and mysticism, J. shows by her analysis of his letters and novels that his characters never develop a sense of the embodied self, of meaningful language, or of a relationship to God. Correlatively, because they are trapped by a self-enclosed view of language, they never reach any source of consciousness or of transcendent meaning. As a result, J. concludes that “Beckett’s apophatic mood leads toward disunity, diminishment and nihilism” (119), producing an esthetic and personal solipsism and negative theism that lacks a self, meaningful language, or treatment of God in human experience. This failure is for her a sign that these three must be found in a different modern author, C. S. Lewis.

Lewis in his youth struggled with some of the problems embodied in Beckett’s characters and novels. He found himself in a suffocating self-absorption, an obsession with his fantasy life and later with the occult, and eventually a rejection of religion and God. All this negativity as described in his autobiography, *Surprised by Joy*, led him to focus on positive moments of what he called “joy,” a dissatisfaction making him happier than any satisfaction. This led to his conversion in his 20s to theism and later to Christianity, but it also left him with little interest in self-consciousness but rather in the “objective” world of friendships, interpretation of literature, and religious life as an Anglican don at Oxford. J. finds that his conversion to the importance of the self and its relationship with God emerged from his readings that accompanied and followed his conversion. These influences included his trinitarian understanding of God as subsistent relations, his discussion of biblical bases for the Trinity, his reading of Plato and

Augustine's philosophy, and his devotion to the late-Victorian thinker and fantasy novelist, George MacDonald. J. cites Lewis's book *Prayer: Letters to Malcolm* as a summary of his personalist theory of the self-God relationship: "By unveiling . . . we assume the high rank of persons before Him [God]. And He, descending becomes a Person to us. . . . The Person in Him . . . meets those who can welcome or at least face it. He speaks as 'I' when we truly call him 'Thou'" (18–19, cited by J., 200). This unveiling becomes the climax of Lewis's *Till We Have Faces* (1956), when the main character, Orual, overcomes her escape from herself through a series of artificial masks and reaches self-knowledge and love of the other. However, Lewis makes it clear that this self-understanding and love occurs only through others who "mirror" her to herself, and through the grace of God. Lewis's prose works expand on the spiritual need for prayer and Scripture reading.

J. situates her study of the self-God relationship within a contemporary feminist theological debate with Daphne Hampson, author of *Theology and Feminism* (1990), *After Christianity* (1996), and *Christian Contradictions* (2001). J.'s arguments show the inadequacy of Hampson's notion that mature individual autonomy is necessarily threatened by a relationship with God, especially in Christianity as connoting a transcendent, personal trinitarian God who is "other" and the source of "self-giving love." In contrast to the totally autonomous individual who is diminished by a relationship with the Christian God, J. affirms the paradoxical notion of the self in Christian theology, a self enriched and transformed by a relationship of love and union with a transcendent but incarnate God in Christ. As J. says in her conclusion: "The paradoxes of the self entail not only a transcendent God who is most vitally present in particulars, but a personal God whose presence calls out our particular personalities" (262).

Although J.'s interpretations of Beckett and Lewis are convincing for the most part, she occasionally confuses theological concepts and language (and gains little from her discussions of mysticism in the unmystical Beckett and Lewis). For example, she confuses the incomprehensibility of God with the "unknowability" of God (231). A similar confusion occurs in her discussion of the apophatic tradition in Beckett and Lewis (110–20, 232–33), and the relationship of images or metaphors to concepts in language about the deity (234–35). A similar ambiguous passage is on the meaning of Lewis's notion of "glory" and his aversion to theories of "divinization" or participation of the human in the divine (255–58). However, J. concludes that Lewis clearly affirms the importance of self-knowledge, community, and intimacy with God as essential to human fulfillment in both the present age and the age to come.