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## Review of No Ordinary People: 21 Friendships of C. S. Lewis

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Joel D. Heck, *No Ordinary People: 21 Friendships of C. S. Lewis* (Hamden, CT: Winged Lion Press, 2021). 384 pages. \$19.50. ISBN 9781935688228.

People return to Lewis's narrative works not only for the snow-gilt lamppost, floating islands, and unbendable grass, but for the diverse assemblage of characters he depicts so well that one gets the impression he knew them. Once met, who can forget King Lune, MacPhee, the Fox, or Sarah Smith? Joel Heck's latest book, *No Ordinary People: 21 Friendships of C. S. Lewis*, does not get bogged down in trying to make one-to-one connections between Lewis's friends and his literary creations. In fact, Heck may be just about the only Lewis scholar who takes seriously the cautions in *The Personal Heresy*, an exchange that rails against interpreting literature through the author's biography. Instead, Heck explores a diverse array of Lewis's friendships revealing a cast of colorful characters who made an impression on Lewis, helping shape the man who would become the memorable author even as he influenced them.

Heck organizes the book into three major sections: "Side by Side Friends," "Opponents, but Friends," and "Co-workers and Fellow Pilgrims." Fellow Oxford apologist Austin Farrer and childhood friend Arthur Greeves fall under the first category. The secondary section features Arthur C. Clark, an atheist science-fiction author, as well as Alec Vidler who was a liberal theologian and magazine editor. Lastly, Oxford Socratic Club founder and chairman Stella Aldwinckle and former student Mary Neylan are found in the third category. Heck does not spend much time elaborating on the difference between "Side by Side Friends" and "Co-workers and Fellow Pilgrims," but the latter seems to be confined to relationships where Lewis was interacting more as a professional colleague (such as with Cambridge colleague, classicist Nan Dunbar), mentor, and even father figure (for Maureen Moore, the sister of Paddy Moore whose family Lewis agreed to look after when Paddy died in WWI). Mrs. Janie Moore is somewhat awkwardly placed in the first section, although the standards for inclusion are never quite laid out. Heck offers prior popularity of the relationships as reasons against including Tolkien, Williams, Barfield, Davidman, and Sayers, and yet Arthur Greeves, Warren Lewis, and Hugo Dyson are all included (5). The intentionally diverse cast may be meant to show that extraordinary people can be found where least expected.

Chapters are written such that they stand alone which occasionally

leads to redundancies. For instance, the same event featuring multiple friends may be repeated in more than one chapter, as in the case of a dinner party featuring Nan Dunbar and Murial Bradbrook, described twice within six pages. The subject of each chapter, unfortunately, is not included at the header of each page. However, chapters often include a brief introductory section on how the subject of the chapter knew Lewis, a brief biography, an extended section on the relationship with Lewis, and a conclusion with reflections on the relationship and friendship in general, though these sub-sections vary. Chapters vary widely in length, from eight pages for Bradbrook to twenty-six devoted to C.E.M. Joad. Sister Penelope's thirty-page chapter is somewhat inflated by three appendices, listing her books, the date and subject of all of Lewis's letters to her, and a list of all the books and authors they discussed. In fact, you will find several chapters include appendices, as well as multiple pictures. The book's greatest virtue lies in fleshing out the picture of people whose names Lewis readers have likely heard but never truly known, while introducing new characters to fill in gaps. For example, a reader will learn Hugo Dyson "probably had a greater impact than Tolkien" on Lewis's conversion (34), that the famed "Do *you* like that?" meeting between Lewis and Arthur Greeves took place when the former was 15 and the latter 18, and that Mrs. Moore may have been unfairly characterized in scholarship due to overreliance on Warnie's criticisms and she may not have been an atheist when she died (105). Lewis's collegial, and at times deferential, relations with his female colleagues at Cambridge will challenge some stereotypes regarding Lewis, while his paternal/pastoral care for his former students and relations will make one appreciate the man's compassion even more. "Opponents but Friends" will likely garner the most interest. The fact that Lewis would lend his support to Arthur C. Clarke, who initiated correspondence with Lewis stating, "I wish to disagree, somewhat violently, with you" to help promote Clark's book *Childhood's End* is but one striking example of what friendship among those with striking disagreements can develop (202, 206).

A reader of Heck's work not only meets many interesting people, they meet many interesting sources. Heck mines the Lewis family papers, Lewis's letters, both Lewis brothers' diaries—including Warren's unpublished diary—oral histories, and direct contact with various legatees of the original subjects. For many of the friends, the basic biographical information comes from Walter Hooper's *Companion and Guide*, but

Heck also makes extensive use of the records and writings of the friends themselves. Heck employs all the various anthologies of memories of those who knew Lewis e.g., *Speaker and Teacher*, *At the Breakfast Table*, *C. S. Lewis Remembered*, and a broad assortment of secondary articles from publications ranging from *VII* to *Sehnsucht* to *CSL*, to *A Pilgrim in Narnia*.<sup>1</sup>

*No Ordinary People* is no ordinary book.<sup>2</sup> Its scope and scholarship immediately commend it as a go-to resource for Lewis scholars.<sup>3</sup> Its subject matter makes it of great interest in a world where meaningful friendships—friendships that challenge us and make us grow into better people—are typically few in number. How did Lewis do it? *No Ordinary People* will inspire readers to pursue their own friendships further and to seek friendship in unexpected persons. It will also likely leave readers wanting to check out a book by Warnie, Sister Penelope, or Arthur Clarke. Or perhaps another book by Joel Heck. When can he write the sequel?<sup>4</sup>

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Crystal Hurd, *The Leadership of C. S. Lewis: Ten Traits to Encourage Change and Growth* (Hamden, CT: Winged Lion Press, 2022). 232 pages. \$18.99. ISBN 9781935688334.

In *The Leadership of C. S. Lewis*, Crystal Hurd makes a winsome case that C. S. Lewis was and is a leader. This case is based on a concept of leadership as influence. Other forms and understandings of leadership

<sup>1</sup> Frustratingly, the formatting of the citations is quite inconsistent, making them harder to navigate.

<sup>2</sup> Publisher, Winged Lion Press, has been on a roll lately with Lewis scholarship. See, for example, *The Undiscovered C. S. Lewis* edited by Bruce R. Johnson and *The Leadership of C. S. Lewis* by Crystal Hurd.

<sup>3</sup> Lewis scholars already had much to be grateful for in Joel Heck's online publication, "Chronologically Lewis," a more than 1,000 page record of every known date of an event in Lewis's life, available at [JoelHeck.com](http://JoelHeck.com).

<sup>4</sup> Potential candidates for inclusion in a subsequent volume might include Fred Paxford, E.M.W. Tillyard, Ruth Pitter, Roger Lancelyn Green, William T. Kirkpatrick, and Douglas Gresham.