

ICONS

Overview

Icons is a series that features people who have contributed to our society.

Muhammad Ali : His Life and Times by Thomas Hauser

For the first time in my 4.5 years of leading book discussions, I had 3 men inquire about the discussion. Sadly, none of them showed up, so it was a small but mighty group of four regulars who met to discuss Muhammad Ali: His Life and Times by Thomas Hauser yesterday afternoon.

I began by asking people about their memories of Ali as a way to get people talking. None of us were boxing fans, so no one had watched any of the fights, but everyone had some memory of him and his presence in the culture, from shouting "I am the greatest!" as Cassius Clay to lighting the torch at the 1996 Olympics. Normally, I have a list of possible questions that I keep to myself and pick and choose from as needed, but this time I decided to pass them out to see what people might pick for themselves, and it was a fairly successful strategy. Some topics we covered:

--Why Ali converted to the Nation of Islam and then to Islam proper. No one really seemed to understand this. I often sometimes wonder about the necessity of "humanities professionals" to lead these discussions, but when someone asked why Ali kept referring to God after he became a Muslim, I decided perhaps there was a place for us. "Ah, God and Allah, same dude," I said.

--Ali as a symbol of Vietnam War resistance (and other things). How did he come to symbolize a movement he wasn't really a part of?

(Around this point, I dug out the timeline I'd made of Ali's life, political events, and events in the civil rights and anti-war movements in order to provide some context for the times--i.e. the first national march against Vietnam was in 1965, the same year Malcolm X was assassinated, two years after "I have a dream" and two years before Dr. King came out publicly against the war, etc., etc., and I brought in a bunch of books, starting with King's first book and ending with Stokely Carmichael's Black Power to demonstrate currents in the movement.)

--Sports figures as political figures and as marketers and as heroes. We compared and contrasted Ali to more

modern sports stars in terms of his political opinions, his character, and his abilities as a self-marketer.

--What Ali represented for various groups of people--blacks, whites, etc. I read a little bit of a speech of Malcolm X's about blacks having been taught to hate Africa and themselves, and tried to explain a bit about what might have been appealing about the Nation of Islam, black power, and other strands of those movements. People talked a bit about their own experiences with segregation and their impressions of that and of the efforts to end it.

It was a great discussion--one of the better ones we've had--though of course I wish we'd gotten a few more people.

Laura Crossett

Eight of us gathered to discuss Muhammad Ali, the book and the person. We began by talking about the qualities of an icon and the reasons we need icons. Then we talked about the reasons Ali is an icon and the reasons he is so fascinating. Seven of us are old enough to remember Ali, but one participant is 23. It was interesting to hear her perspective on the book and the person (she read only the first few chapters because she couldn't tolerate his bragging nature). In part because of her comments, we talked about persons who are icons right now. We came up with Lady Gaga as a good example.

We discussed the various issues surrounding Ali--his refusal to go into the army, his conversion to Islam, his attitudes about boxing. We talked about the part the media played in Ali's life and how he so successfully used the media and seemed to have a natural instinct for knowing how to promote himself and boxing.

We talked about the anti-Muslim sentiment--an interesting topic considering the anti-Muslim sentiment in our country now.

We talked about the book itself--the pros and cons of listing many quotations from interviews and the reasons the book was written. If I were to discuss this book in another group, I would be sure to tell persons before they read it that should be sure to read the last two chapters if they can't get through the whole thing.

In the last two chapters, one really sees the transformation of Ali and understands better the type of person he is.

We ended the discussion by looking at UTube footage of Ali. One segment I highly recommend is the advertisement for MS support in which Ali and Michael J. Fox appear together. It's funny.

Maggie Garner

On February 14 nine of us had a lively discussion of MUHAMMAD ALI. There were various opinions of the man about everything in the book but his boxing. Everyone agreed that he was a great boxer! His evolution

from quiet boxer to loud boxer, from his poor grades in school to his intense study of the Qu'ran, from his shyness to his love of pretty women caused stirred emotions in the group. The range of feelings ran from almost dismissal to tremendous admiration. One of the main topics was his change of religious stance from a Baptist-Methodist background to the Nation of Islam and later universal Islam. The many details in the book about the Nation of Islam were new to some and created discussion of racial matters and how they affected Ali. The gain and loss of wealth was another area of discussion - his generosity was certainly admired, but his inability or unwillingness to stop the many scams around him was discussed considerably. We looked at the time of his youth and growing up days with interest as the background for some of his actions and attitudes.

The style of writing was discussed with some liking it, but just as many feeling the author didn't really write; he pieced together comments from other journalists and comments from people he interviewed. Mr. Hauser is a sports journalish as well as a fiction writer.

Certainly Muhammad Ali burst on the world scene as a boxer by winning the Olympic Gold and he went on to prove he was more than a young braggart in the boxing world. His influence may be stronger in other areas in regions of the world besides the U. S. Ali's health is a matter of concern and has certainly slowed him somewhat.

In a group of mostly women who have probably not seen many national-international boxing matches, he made the waves of thought and conversation ripple.

Elouise Rossler, Discussion leader

For whatever reason, we had an unusually small gathering (8 people) for this, our final discussion in the series. Most in the group were of an age to have some recollection of Muhammad Ali during his heyday, the one person who is too young was probably the most ardent admirer of him in the group after reading the biography. I asked people what attitude they had about Muhammad before reading the book and how or if the book affected their thinking. Their responses varied from those who greatly admired him and those who didn't think much about him one way or another to one person who came to the book with negative feelings about him. All, except the latter who said she felt she knew and understood more but still didn't "love him", felt that they admired and respected him more for the most part after learning more about his life. We started with the following questions:

- Who WAS this man?

- How would you characterize him?

- Why an "American Icon"?

After that lengthy discussion, I alluded to a reviewer in the New York Post who refers to the book as a measuring stick of three decades of America --who we were, how we changed, and what we became. We talked about how the

story of Muhammad Ali does reveal those things. It was interesting to have this book follow our last, Jane Fonda's War, which also covered much of that same period. We compared the motives and effect of both Jane Fonda and Ali concerning the Viet Nam War.

No one in this group objected to the style of the writing. They said they enjoyed hearing about Ali from all those different perspectives. Most (but not all!) of us felt we could have done with somewhat less detail about all the boxing matches and about the medical details and reports near the end. On the whole, the book does offer a lot of opportunity for discussion on a wide variety of issues. It was definitely a book few if any of us would have read 'on our own', but we agreed it was worth the commitment.

Norleen Healy

Nine people gathered at the Rocky Mountain Manor in Powell to discuss "Muhammad Ali: His Life and Times" by Thomas Hauser as part of the Icon Reading Series. The reception to this book was mixed. While there was certainly good discussion about Ali's charismatic personality, his choice to convert another religion, and his ideas about race in American, the book group agreed that the format of the book was difficult to follow. As one reader in our group pointed out, the book is actually a compilation of quotes and stories by many friends and associates of Ali as well as Ali himself. The book is not a typical non-fiction biography or narrative. Readers noted that they often skimmed passages because the topics would jump so abruptly from perspective to perspective. With this criticism aside, the book did present many interesting ideas to discuss. We talked longest about the contributions Ali made to American and world society – one could argue that he is the most well-known personality in modern times. Once you start discussing his influence, you can trace his personality and accomplishments into many areas of life – media, sports, race, religion, and so much more.

Nine readers met to talk about the storied life and times of Ali. We were all women with little experience with boxing, although one admitted to being a "fan." Most readers did not read all of the book, but did read the last two chapters. I had suggested that, after reading the suggestion from one of our discussion leaders. Two of us also read David Remnick's more recent biography of Ali. I defended the reading of the Houser biography, noting that it was more inclusive, following Ali's life and career up to 1991. We talked about the style of this oral biography. Most of us appreciated the variety of views that the book offered. We had a long and animated discussion of this sports icon. The areas discussed were Ali's impact on boxing, with a look at the status of boxing today. It was interesting to talk about this following on the heels of Joe Frazier's death earlier this week. This lead us into a discussion of the media attention of the first Ali-Frazier fight (1971), with celebrities even taking part in announcing the fight. Women dressed in furs and satin, sneaking in if they didn't have tickets! My, how times have changed..... We debated if there is simply more to occupy our time today,

or if the physical harm done in boxing has caused its popularity to drop. This led us to the cruel way in which Ali taunted Frazier in all three of their fights, but particularly the last fight in Manila. Was this really cruelty or was this the way Ali found to work himself up to a frenzy before a fight? Whatever, Frazier never forgave Ali. We moved on to the more positive aspects of Ali's long life. He was a beacon to African Americans and greatly helped his race. He was courageous in the face of the draft. He was exceptional in his use of media. He was a politically religious man who became a member of the controversial Nation of Islam only to evolve into a devout Muslim during the 80s. He was generous, both in money and time, to all who approached him. He grew into a beloved figure. And we ended with our ongoing discussion of what makes an icon. I would recommend that discussion leaders watch *When We Were Kings*, Ali, and read the section of *The Brethren* by Bob Woodward that deals with Clay vs. U.S., the Supreme Court case that overturned Ali's conviction for draft evasion.

Barbara Gose

There were nine readers who met last night to discuss ALI. Four men came. The men were knowledgeable about boxing and that was informative. They all remembered that boxing was a regular Friday night television event in the "good ole days." Yet we all agreed that boxing has diminished in interest and importance. However, one man pointed out the popularity of extreme boxing here in Riverton - sold out every time it arrives. So we spent considerable time on the danger, allure, evolution, and racial and class aspects of boxing itself. We talked about Ali as an icon and no one had a problem with this designation for him. We inevitably compared his iconic status to Johnny Cash's and felt conferring iconic status on Cash was a much harder sell. How interesting it is to have this thread running through our four books - great stuff to talk about! We keep coming back to whether or not reinventing oneself is necessary in order to be considered an icon. Then we moved into other aspects of the Ali legend: Ali's generosity, but loss of money due to people and groups taking advantage, Ali's wit and showmanship posited against his abject cruelty to Joe Frazier (and WHY Ali did this), Ali's brilliant use of the media, Ali as an important role model to the African American community both at home and world wide, and finally we ended with a long discussion on Ali's decision to join the Nation of Islam, his religious evolution, and his refusal to serve in the Vietnam War. It was a long and animated discussion, with many disagreements emerging from strongly held views. After all, we had four decades of Ali and American culture to discuss. Oh, and we had an interesting discussion about the style of the book - oral biography. Hauser's book is in good company; there are oral biographies of Aldus Huxley, William Faulkner, Elizabeth Bishop, among others.

Barbara Gose

Five of us gathered in Baggs on Friday, Nov. 18th, a busy day for everyone. Muhammad Ali, compiled and written

by Thomas Hauser, is a long and informative book, with many interviews with friends, acquaintances, wives, and Muhammad Ali himself chiming in on his life. Not everyone got through it, but those who did liked it and felt it was valuable. We discussed the function and value of oral biography, as compared with written, more scholarly studies and autobiographical memoirs; having had all those types in our reading this fall made the strengths and weaknesses of each kind interesting to discuss.

The discussion was lively and wide-ranging. We talked about our memories of Saturday night boxing and discussed possible reasons for its decline; we also shared memories of earlier thoughts about Cassius Clay's/Muhammad Ali's wide fame and engaging cockiness. On one side, Muhammad Ali's embracing of Islam seemed to be deeply spiritual and open-minded, more so than Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X, and other Black Muslims that he associated with. Muhammad Ali truly strove to live his religion, to observe the five pillars of Islam, to pray regularly, fast during Ramadan, go on pilgrimage and to give alms generously to those in need, a practice consistent through his life. On the other hand, his cruelty and verbal abuse of Joe Frazier during their three fights was greatly resented and never forgiven by Frazier.

We also discussed cultural icons and their meaning. Eleanor Roosevelt, Johnny Cash, Ernest Hemingway, and Muhammad Ali were each icons, in the fields of politics and humanitarian works, the music industry, literature, and sports. Each was a larger than life figure which inspired and helped many.

Mary Karen Solomon

5 folks joined me last Tuesday at the Kemmerer Library to discuss Muhammad Ali. We opened the night with some YouTube footage of young Muhammad Ali talking trash through his poems. That got us talking about the fights that some had seen on T.V. back in the day. We went on to discuss his Olympic boxing days and discussed his prowess at such a young age. Never one to lack for confidence, the interviews of him right after the Olympics show a brash young man.

That confident young man shortly turned pro, won the title, and after only a few years was stripped of his title for refusing to go to fight in Vietnam. All of us agreed he had strength not only in the ring but strength of character to stand up for his beliefs. Many Americans disagreed with this young man but later he was vindicated by the Supreme Court. His ties with Elijah Muhammad also caused people in the group to question Ali's true beliefs. Always the one for attention he captivated the spotlight with his boxing prowess and with his tumultuous personal life.

We talked about how Ali was a man of contradictions. He reached great heights in boxing (the Frazier and Foreman fights), and great lows (the Holmes fight). He was a devout Muslim who didn't drink or smoke yet was married four times and did lots of womanizing on the side. He was

generous and forgiving to a fault and so was often taken advantage of nearly becoming broke.

We agreed that few people ever have had or ever will have the ability to draw a crowd the way Muhammad Ali did. We ended the night with some footage of him boxing. What a great entertainer, thanks Ali for giving us a night of lively discussion!

Brian Spicer

Cash **by Johnny Cash**

Ten people checked out the book, but sadly only four of us showed up for the discussion, which makes it a bit hard to do a really good discussion, especially when you are trying to balance between talkative and non-talkative people, but we did our best.

We are doing the brand-new Icons series here, which deals with "biographies of American cultural icons," and it's interesting for me in that, as with the Canine Companions series, the topic of the book seems to be more important than book itself as literature. Anyway.

We talked about how, or whether, our perceptions of Cash changed after reading this book, and we pondered why the Humanities Council chose this one autobiography instead of a biography of Johnny Cash, and what kinds of things we as readers are wary about with an autobiography. People expressed frustration with Cash's occasional ellipses, such as not writing much about his first wife. We also talked a bit about how this book compared with the movie Walk the Line, and how there are clearly a lot of different stories--Cash's, June Carter's, Cash's first wife's, his children's, etc.

I read two definitions of the word icon from the gigantic somewhat ancient Websters in our library, because they were the most interesting ones I could find. The first was "an object of uncritical devotion," which provoked a lot of discussion--how Cash had this whole dichotomy in his public image between being a man of God and being an outlaw. We also discussed a bit about how people are portrayed while they are alive versus after they die. The second definition was "a sign that signifies by virtue of sharing a property with what it represents," and I noted that this was more like what we meant when we said something was iconic. We talked a bit about how Cash defines himself in the book, and about where he is portraying himself as an icon and where he is portraying himself as a man. I asked everyone to look through the pictures in the book as a way of starting off that discussion. Where is he being The Man in Black, and where is he being someone just hanging out with his family? And can he ever be just the latter? Etc.

The part of the conversation that was most interesting to me was getting people of different ages--even our small group spanned people aged 30something to 70something--about their recollections and impressions of Cash over

the years. The older people all said that while, for instance, they vaguely remembered knowing that he had drug problems, it wasn't something people talked about the way that sort of thing gets talked about today. I talked a bit about what I think of as the VH-1 "Behind the Music" syndrome, wherein all rock star stories have exactly the same arc (the drummer who dies, the drug rehabs, the manager who screws you out of your rightful share of the profits and/or with whom you have artistic differences), and how while reading Cash's story, you could see a lot of these tropes, it didn't feel like something you wanted to laugh at, and we talked a bit about why that might be.

Finally, I showed them the video of "Hurt," (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o22eJJDtKho>) which only one person had seen before, because it seemed like a nice summing up of the ways in which Cash remained iconic through the generations.

Next up: Muhammad Ali!

Laura Crossett

Seven of us met to discuss Johnny Cash's autobiography. People had mixed reactions about the book.

We continued our discussion about the definition of an icon. Then we discussed how Cash fit into that definition or didn't.

We talked about whether or not Cash is a reliable narrator, which, of course, is always a factor in autobiographies. We realize that his version of the story might not be the same as others. However, there is an added concern about his narration: he tends to brush events off by saying something like "Oh that wasn't really a problem" whereas when reading about it, we got the sense there was a problem.

We discussed our understanding of country music and how his music reflects country values, looking also at the peaks and valleys of his career, especially the interest in his music by a younger generation in the latter part of his career.

We debated whether Americans like people to be honest about themselves or not and how Cash's bad behavior was overlooked a lot because of his talent.

I gave a summary of what happened in the Cashes' lives after the book, and we listened to some songs by Johnny and Johnny and June.

Maggie Garner

Ten from Ten Sleep met to begin our series of Icons. We discussed the meaning of "icon" and made a list of our own of icons. As the session went on, we added some names to this list. The first book we read was CASH by John Cash and Patrick Carr. Every one knew something about Johnny Cash and his life and the era in which he

was prominent which made the discussion full with much participation.

The cultural impact of Johnny Cash and others of that same time was a topic holding considerable interest. It included the impact of "pills" on Cash, but also on the public as a whole, as we reacted to the fact that many others, such as truck drivers, used these "prescription drugs" and most considered them okay because a doctor first prescribed them. Cash's addiction, what it cost him, how he handled it throughout his life was talked about.

The impact of Cash's ability to move into various genres of music and be successful and the encouragement it gave other musicians was a topic. The comraderie of the musicians - Jerry Lee Lewis, Elvis Presley, Carl Perkins, and others- was noted as seeming very different than the apparent lack of encouragement of each other in today's entertainment world.

Cash's religious conflicts, searches, values, and lifestyle was assessed in a broad range from feeling he was truly spiritually motivated to thinking he grew into the strength of his convictions over a lifetime as he developed into what it seemed all along God wanted him to do. His intelligence, love of history, especially Biblical history, and his voracious reading gave him insight and understanding. His roots were in Southern Gospel and it was always the basic backbone of his music. His lyrics reflected the simple and gripping message of gospel music.

Cash struggled with the death of his older brother and the reaction of his harsh Southern father to his nonchalance about life compared to his brother's serious approach. This was a lifelong conflict between the two men; though resolved to some degree.

The cultural impact of the extreme work ethic Cash's father had and the new focus of work during the fifties and sixties as John's rebelliousness regarding labor as he had known it on the cotton farm is a reflection of some of the changes made during this historic time of cultural change.

Johnny Cash was an American icon of the twentieth century and his legacy will live on.

Elouise Rossler, Ten Sleep

I began the discussion by asking what makes Johnny Cash an "American Icon." Some of the thoughts here were that his music spanned such a long period in American music, a period that brought many new styles hinging from country and gospel, ones that Cash exemplified. That he lived longer than so many of the others (Elvis, for example) of his ilk and continued to develop during all that time as a songwriter and performer contributes to his "iconic" status, we decided. Also his personal style, a "bad boy," man-in-black rebel, was compelling to American as well as international audiences during the fifty or so years that he held stage. We talked about the American cultural scene during the second half

of the twentieth century and how Cash comes to represent much of what was going on.

Some of the other questions we based our discussion on were as follows:

- What was your impression of J. Cash before reading the book? and then after?

- Who were some of the others mentioned in the book that interested you? (Lots of talk here)

- What did these singers/songwriters/musicians have in common?

- What about the narrator's voice? What is the role of a "ghost writer?" Did you "hear" Patrick Carr? Do we really know Johnny Cash from the book? (Another place where we had lots of discussion and divergent opinions)

Then I just asked the group to point out things that particularly interested them in the book. I had a list of my own here as did many others which got us to specific passages and quite a varied and interesting discussion.

When I was preparing for the discussion on this book, I wondered if I could really sustain a good discussion for a reasonable period of time, but I needn't have worried. Even those who didn't think the book was "very well written" engaged with enthusiasm. It was a fun evening - enhanced, of course, by CD's that several fans brought in to play.

Norleen Healy

Nine people gathered at the Rocky Mountain Manor in Powell to discuss Cash: The Autobiography of Johnny Cash. Reviews were split. While many people in the group generally enjoyed the book, opinions were divided about some of the specific details of his life. Some critiqued Cash for not taking enough responsibility for his drug use, for not making more of an effort during his first marriage, for not taking care of his children from his first marriage. People in the group also critiqued the last chapter or so of the book, which focuses largely on his religious experiences and many sentimental words of thanks to friends and family. Group members thought those pages went on too long and were too general. On the other hand, some people in the group enjoyed Cash's recollections of his childhood in the south. His family made a living from the land from hard work, which sounded remarkably similar to life in Wyoming during the same era. Other people in the groups enjoyed Cash's memories of his creativity, especially songwriting, performing, and other ventures and ideas. We even discussed our favorite Cash songs as well as other music from various time periods of our lives. In all, we couldn't help but compare the book to the fairly recent bio-pic of Cash's life, Walk the Line. It was a good discussion.

Michael Konsmo

Nine readers convened to discuss Johnny Cash's autobiography. First, thanks for the "heads up" about video of the song, "Hurt." I started with it and progressed to a few comments about how the Cash legacy lives on (who knew that there is an annual "Cash" Carnival cruise with family members). Lander readers loved the book, loved talking about Johnny's life, loves, misadventures, and music. We wove these subjects in and out of our deliberations about icons. What is the difference between an icon and a celebrity? Can a "bad" person be an icon? Does longevity make an icon? Being dead? Do icons reach that status in part because they continue to reinvent themselves? Cash's life began and ended with gospel music, but there were many different types of music in-between. We enjoyed learning about the music industry and meeting other musicians through the book. I mentioned that Roseanne Cash has had a successful career herself and has recently written a memoir (COMPOSED) that provides greater detail about Cash's first wife and the children from that marriage. We ended with a discussion of the role June Carter played in her husband's rehabilitation and career. But we really ended with good Johnny Cash music.

Barbara Gose

Thirteen readers met to listen to and talk about Johnny Cash. I started by showing two videos, one a duet with June from the middle of his singing career and the other at the end of his life. I talked about how gospel music was important both at the beginning and the end of his career, especially as he came back to gospel in the American Recordings with Rick Rubin. The group spend a great deal of time talking about icons and what makes an icon. We agreed the the following were key to making Johnny Cash an icon: endurance or longevity, authenticity, and people feeling a connection/taking someone like Cash into their heart. A celebrity is a more fleeting concept. But we did agree that someone could be an icon representing a negative image. At this point we switched gears and examined Cash's life and legacy. One reader found the whole section on his military service useless. She argued that it seemed out of place in the book. I countered that it might seem that way because Cash was young and unknown and was simply a young soldier serving his time and not a celebrity as Elvis was during his military tenure. We talked about the importance of the early years, of the older brother's death, the role his mother played in fostering his love of music and the encouragement she provided, and the solace and also joy of radio in Cash's life. It was interesting to hear various views on Cash's drug addiction. Most readers felt that little was known at that time about addiction and we would see it as more of an illness today. We acknowledged the role that June played in Johnny's rehabilitation and the important place she held in his life. While few of us are big county music fans, all recognized the role Cash played in music, county, gospel, and even rock. It was interesting to talk about the collegiality of county music people - how they shared with one another and supported each other. We discussed numerous musicians that Cash mentioned in the book. And finally we talked about Cash's ability to reinvent himself over the many decades of his musical career.

Who knew that Cash cds are still being made (Bootleg Three is just out), that there was a Cash project to set images to a last Cash song, and that one could take a cruise on Carnival with a Johnny Cash theme! We had a grand time talking Cash life and times.

Barbara Gose

On Friday, August 19, 7 of us gathered at the Baggs Museum/Welcome Center to discuss Cash: A Life, Johnny Cash's later autobiography, written with Patrick Carr. (He had written an earlier one, Man in Black in 1975.) Written in the late 90's, Cash: A Life has an older, more measured and thoughtful perspective on Cash's eventful and celebrated life. Appropriately written in a musical wave form, which seems casual, spontaneous and unformed until one realizes the returning themes, the book is long on experiences with colleagues, but contains poetical reflections and heart-piercing thoughts and reflections as well.

Johnny Cash's love and devotion for his "soulmate," June Carter Cash, his second wife, whose death in 2003 he survived less than four months, comes through clearly. June, supporting Johnny through addictions and confused times, was instrumental in thte confrontation that turned Cash's life around, and central to his reformation. Johnny, always a Christian, though in his earlier years a troubled believer prone to addictions, was able to overcome his addictions and clean his life up after the intervention by family and friends and his subsequent stay in the Betty Ford Center. During his later years, he wrote a novel about the life of St. Paul, Man in White, as well as many songs.

Continuing popular with several generations of music-lovers, Cash reinvented his music and audience several times throughout his life. Cash shows clearly in his book how his music was central to his eventful life, from his brother Jack's early and tragic death, through his struggle with drugs, and tragic losses of friends and family. The group discussed his addictions, his family life, and the lessons he learned from his troubles.

The Medicine Bow reading group met for our first book discussion today at the Medicine Bow library. We read Johnny Cash the Autobiography from the Icons series. Fewer of us showed up than what we had hoped for, but we those of us who made it had a nice discussion on Johnny Cash.

The first thing we talked about was how much we thought we knew about Johnny Cash. Some in our group were surprised at the extent of his substance abuse, but we all appreciated the candor with which he presented his struggle with addiction. We talked about whether it was a lack of strength that led him to the drugs and kept him there, or if in fact it was his strength that allowed him to seek help from others to try to keep his addictions at bay.

Since this was an autobiography and not just a biography we had insight into his feelings and motivations, and this book was rather reflective. He seemed to be writing it in

stages and just writing what came to him when he sat down to write, and what comes through are a lot of reflections on addiction, spirituality, fame, family, and the interplay of these things. He was fair in his writing, giving credit to those who earned it, and trying to say the least and best things about those who had done him wrong in his life.

I think his addiction really framed the discussion of the book. We felt that he was writing this book as a way of explanation, and possibly atonement, and maybe as a way to express his spirituality. We were very interested in his inclusion of several cases of what we decided to call premonitions. He presents several instances where people seemed to know what was headed their way, be it death, an injury, or a chance encounter with Johnny himself, but he while presenting them he doesn't outright say that this is something he believes or doesn't, just that in these cases it seemed to happen.

We really enjoyed this book and are looking forward to our next book, Jane Fonda's War, which promises to be a controversial discussion topic!

Robyn Lopez

Jane Fonda's War : a Political Biography of an Anti-War Icon

By Mary Hershberger

Five of us met to discuss this book, and everyone was quite impressed with it. This series has not generated the interest that others have, but those participating have enjoyed the books.

Everyone was overwhelmed by the lies told about Fonda and the surveillance by the government. At the same time, we remembered the horrors of the Vietnam War. We talked a lot about the events described in the book and the effect Fonda's experiences might have on today's anti-war protesters. We watched a clip on UTube showing her giving a speech at an anti-war rally in January 2007. She states that was the first time she had spoken at an anti-war rally in 34 years because she was afraid that the lies told about her would sully the movement. If one searches "Jane Fonda traitor" on the internet, 90,000 websites appear.

The book seems to be well researched, the author having looked at the enormous FBI file on Fonda (one source said it is 20-feet long) as well as interviewing the POWs she met in Hanoi and contemporary press releases. In an article I found, John Dean praises Mary Hershberger's research skills (and writes about the many discrepancies she found in John McCain's story about his Vietnam experiences).

We talked about how she really paved the way for anti-war protesters and how the rhetoric aimed against her was very specifically towards a woman. What would detractors

have said if she were a man? We also marvelled at how well Fonda kept her cool with all the harassment of her.

We also talked about how people's imaginations can create false memories.

I especially like Mark Kurlansky's quote on the back of the book: "I have always thought that treason was a word thrown out by tyrants to cover up their crimes. That is the lesson of Mary Hershberger's important new book--a book Jane Fonda could not have written herself."

We also watched the trailer for the film of the show Fonda and others put on for GIs during the Vietnam War. Interesting.

Maggie Garner

There was a lot of passion and thoughtfulness throughout the discussion about this book, but it's particularly hard to summarize our discussion last night because it took off in so many different directions.

Most present (with the exception of one young lady) admitted of being at least somewhat "of age" during the 60's and early 70's so I began by asking the participants what images or thoughts they had about Jane Fonda before reading the book.

The responses were varied, but ran the gamut from "troublemaker" to not really thinking of her one way or another. Then I asked if the book affected their thinking, and the floodgates opened. A couple of people were offended by how "slanted" the author seemed to be claiming that she set Jane Fonda up as some kind of a paragon. We did look at the author's credentials then and her use of sources. Others said the book got them thinking a lot about the Viet Nam war era as well as Jane Fonda's role in the anti-war sentiment. One of our participants read an email that she received from her cousin who had been a "tunnel rat" in Viet Nam in response to her asking him what he remembered from a soldier's perspective about Jane Fonda's role during the war. Predictably he had much to say about what he saw as the demoralizing effect of her work, mentioning particularly the FTA groups in the coffee houses and the protests she held at the colleges around the country. It was interesting that he remembered so many of the details of her anti-war work. We talked about how that divisiveness that characterized the national sentiment in the US about that war still exists to some extent, as well as the confusion as to what the war was all about. We agree that, while she certainly wasn't alone in her views, Jane Fonda seems to have served as a catalyst for the anger and confusion of the whole period.

Among many other topics that people were anxious to broach, we discussed the draft and the effect of that on the military; several felt that this was the key to the internal problems in the military. We spent a great deal of time talking about the whole culture of that period in our country, how many norms were being challenged and

overturned. We also talked about how the culture of mistrust and cynicism about authority emanated from the events of that time, and in many cases (some illustrated in the book) rightfully so. We recognized the period as heralding the beginning of the media wars we are enmeshed in today.

Regardless of how one feels about Jane Fonda's methods, we agreed that the response of some of the government entities was appalling....most notably, of course, Hoover's FBI. How can we ever know what to believe? several asked. We found some reassurance that there were people on both sides of the aisle who did not bow to the political pressures and the propaganda. people like Keindienst of the Justice Department and Congressman Clarence Long. In the end, in spite of the divergence about the book and Jane Fonda, most agreed that Jane Fonda was sincere, committed, and "gutsy". That was a big concession for some who came to the discussion "loaded for bear" (sorry about the cliché).

As we were leaving, someone said: "One thing about this group, no one is afraid to speak his or her mind!" And that's true, but the best thing about that is the tolerance and respect they allow for each other's point of view even when it's very different from their own. That's a particularly good thing for a book like this one!

Nine people gathered at the Rocky Mountain Manor in Powell to discuss "Jane Fonda's War: A Political Biography of an Antiwar Icon" by Mary Hershberger as part of the Icon Reading Series. All of the people in the group had heard about Jane Fonda's participation in protesting the Vietnam War, yet we agreed that we had very little factual background until we read this book. Overall, we found that the book was well-researched and well-written, and, in all, provided a fair, objective view about Jane Fonda's activities during the heat of Vietnam War protests in America. The group acknowledged that the book detailed facts they previously did not know about Fonda – why she got involved, where she protested, who she befriended, who were her enemies, and so on. We all agreed that the two most interesting parts of the book were: 1) How President Richard Nixon and FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover ordered lots of time and money following Jane Fonda, creating many feet of files about her activities, and 2) How her trip to North Vietnam in 1972 was first reported and then re-reported, bringing up the notion of "spin." In all, the book was an interesting look at an era, a person, and a movement that are often referenced in private and public discussion, but rarely agreed upon. This book is a good collection of evidence.

Michael Konsmo

This was our last book in the ICONS series and it produced a spirited discussion. We had four men in attendance. Interestingly, none of them served in Vietnam - school deferments, exceptions, working in government. But they had plenty to say, knowing they could have been drafted and knowing plenty of men who were. This book elicited the strongest emotions of any book we have read -

in any series. I think this proves the point that feelings about the Vietnam War still run high. Here are the subjects we discussed. Why did Fonda undertake this mission? How much of the anger against her is because she is female (why not Dr. Spock, for instance)? How did the author portray her - too much of a saint? How does the author's account of the events differ from Fonda's recollection of events (her autobiography is invaluable here - MY LIFE SO FAR)? How do these views mesh with POW views? Other authors' views? What did we learn from the role of government in demonizing Fonda?

How do these events compare to today and the Iraq War, the war in Afghanistan? How does this book affect our view of government? of Fonda? of war? . And I passed around a timeline of Vietnam. Our intrepid researcher, Carol Deering, made her own timeline of the years of Fonda 1969-71, including music, current events, cultural happenings, during that time. Most interesting. It help to ground us in that period, now history. The group loved the series and wished for more. And that is a good way to end.

Barbara Gose

Nine readers gathered for our last ICONS book discussion. This is such an interesting group spanning an age range from 30s to mid 70s. They hail from all parts of the country and always bring different perspectives to our book discussions. And their minds are open to new ideas, as well as books they never thought they'd read. Plus someone always brings snacks! At the end of the evening we talked about possible series for next year, meeting dates and times, and encouraging new people to join us. And yet at nine to twelve participants at a discussion, the size is perfect for full (and vigorous) participation. I began our book discussion with an overview of both Fonda's books, her autobiography and her more recent "how to age" self help book. Both include pictures that were of interest to the group and both filled in for us some pertinent background on her life not included in Hershberger's very targeted book. I recommend that discussion leaders take a look at both. Ot her readers had brought articles about Fonda from recent magazines. And so we talked about her life - her difficult childhood, her various marriages, and her invention and then several reinventions of herself. We examined the reasons for her interest in, and then obsession with, soldiers and Vietnam. From that discussion we progressed to the reasons for the White House's obsession with HER, and not many of the other anti-war activists. I think that it's important to put her activism against the war into a time frame; it occurred late in the war, when few troops were even on the ground. But it occurred during the time of Nixon's efforts at reelection and that increased his paranoia. Along the way we discussed Hoover and the FBI, the Pentagon Papers, Watergate, the draft (and who was drafted), the kind of war Vietnam was, the Vietnam memorial, John Kerry, and the role POW's and veterans played and continue to play in continuing her (deserved or not) demonization. Opinio ns will likely always differ as to her role in the Vietnam War. I'm personally fascinated by the extent to which the internet perpetuates this. I suggest that the group have

access to a timeline of the war. We ended the book discussion by comparing our current war(s) with the Vietnam War and the difficulties of "coming home" for our soldiers today. Jane Fonda's War was an excellent choice for this series. We have loved all the books and learned from the entire series. I would recommend doing them in this order: Roosevelt, Cash, Ali, and Fonda (those are the books we read).

Barbara Gose

18 participants gathered to discuss this controversial book last night in Ranchester. The initial reaction was lukewarm. One person said she absolutely refused to read it, and some others said they didn't finish it. On the other hand, there were some enthusiasts about the book. When I went around the room and asked each to tell us what attitudes they came to the book with about Jane Fonda and the Viet Nam War, most admitted they came to the book with a built-in bias, one way or another, and that this affected their reading of it. Their realizing this was important I thought. Most also felt that Hershberger was biased, which is irrefutable, but the issue I asked them to consider was how she documented the details she presented. This opened the door to talk about the facts vs the myths surrounding Jane Fonda's involvement in the anti-war movement. It surprises people to learn that she became vocal and involved during the waning days of the war, the early 1970's, not during the middle to late 60's, and that her primary 'cause' was the continued bombing of the non military targets in North Viet Nam. All in the group agreed that the Hoover/Nixon government's tactics in trying to undermine Jane and the other anti-war protesters was shocking. Several in the group had husbands or other family members in the war and recounted stories they heard from them. We talked about the whole period and cultural shifts that were occurring in the U.S. during the 60's and how that accounted for much of the divisiveness over the war.

Inevitably, we found ourselves comparing the Viet Nam War to the recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. This too got a bit dicey, but it was an important and provocative discussion.

In the end, perhaps the lesson from the book and the discussion was how important it is to try hard to set aside preconceptions and bias when we explore issues, especially those with political underpinnings, and approach them as openly as possible. And we agreed that the key to this is recognizing our biases as such, which we don't always do.

Norleen Healy

Six of us met at the Medicine Bow library this month to discuss the book Jane Fonda's War by Mary Hershberger. Prior to reading this book, many of the participants of the book club had some strong opinions of Jane Fonda and her involvement in the Vietnam war, and in fact, we lost a few potential discussion members because of this.

One of the first things that we discussed was the use of misinformation by the media both during the era discussed in the book and today. As we saw in the book, Jane Fonda was made a scapegoat by the government and the media, out of all the activists involved in anti-war activities mostly because she was the most famous activist, and therefore already more visible in the anti-war cause. Once the government decided to target her, and start disseminating false information, the damage to her reputation was already done, because even if they retract the information, or state that it is speculation, people start to change their opinion of her. This led to a lot of problems for Jane, especially when it came to her privacy. We discussed whether as a famous person she ought to have tried to do less controversial things, or if it was something she should be doing to take advantage of the attention she was already being paid to bring important things to the attention of the public. Several of the readers had trouble following the writing style of the author and had trouble keeping track of what was fact and what had been alleged, especially since a fair number of the readers in our group had seen some of the misinformation in the news.

We also spent a good deal of time discussing the difference in public opinion of America at war during different wars, specifically World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. We talked about how the country came together during WWII because our country had been attacked and some of our members recalled rationing during the war and the patriotism attributed to it, and others recalled interacting with soldiers around town in their youth. We talked about how activism against military actions picked up when activism over many causes was gaining strength in the U.S. and how the country was less supportive of the wars because they were no longer defending America directly.

It was the consensus of our group that the main problem that Jane Fonda had was that after the war, because the country lost so many young men, and left the conflict without anything they could call a victory, she became the focus of anger that should have actually been focused on the grief of the country and the soldiers over "losing the war".

We are looking forward to discussing the life of Eleanor Roosevelt next month.

Robyn Lopez

Eleanor Roosevelt, Vol. 1: 1884-1933

by Blanche Wiesen Cook

No, Eleanor was not at the library. Only four of us met, probably because of a raging blizzard going on. But something tells me Eleanor would have made it through the blizzard if she were with us.

She was with us in spirit, however, as we watched several films of her available through U-tube. Especially good was a 11-minute montage by the FDR Library.

There's so much to talk about in this book. We discussed who Eleanor really was, why she developed into the person she did, and her tremendous influence. We talked about the many events that shaped her life and certainly influenced the U.S. Just her quotes themselves provide much fodder for discussion. The events in her political life led us to compare the U.S. then and now, and there are certainly many parallels.

We all thought the book excellent. The only downside to it is the length, which is intimidating to some (but I'll add that I enjoyed almost every page; I found it a page-turner). The project director and I agreed to send out a pre-meeting notice that people did not need to read the whole book to come to the discussion. We're not sure if the blizzard or the book length kept many people away.

Maggie Garner

The Ten Sleep discussion group met to consider ELEANOR ROOSEVELT as our third selection. The group generally enjoyed learning about Mrs. Roosevelt, but did not like the book's format style (too detailed about things not necessary to understanding her). Various opinions were offered regarding the arrangement Franklin and Eleanor made after his affair. The diverse and various relationships they each had seemed to relate to some of the presumed ideas the Clinton's have lived through and with in our time. The background of the Roosevelts in their growing up years seemed to almost predestine them to some of the events which later occurred. The eye-opening experience at school for Eleanor certainly shaped some of her destiny. Her unhappy childhood must have lead her thinking at times and might have been the reason she was as amenable to Franklin as she was. The rampant alcoholism in the families and the almost driven energy of some and the lethargic attitude of others in the family gave rise to levels of productivity and humanitarianism in Eleanor. She took on roles because of her own beliefs in trying to promote better conditions for fellow humans; she also took on roles to make sure Franklin was successful. She was a feminist, but also tied very closely to the beliefs of the family and the idea of elitism. which her children were raised in. Most of us admired the good things she did, sympathized with things that happened over which she had no control. It seems to fully either appreciate her greatly or not , we would need to read the second book. There was no one interested enough to propose that.

One thing that seems to recur each time is that we do not really understand the book selections based on the theme of ICONS. Perhaps the theme should be expanded to include the reason for the choice, such as ICON of Music in certain genre or eras, or ICON of Feminism in certain time frames. The selections seem to only fit specific categories, not totality of humanity.

Elouise Rossler

10 stalwart souls showed up in a major snowstorm to discuss Eleanor Roosevelt, the first in our ICONS series.

I started by generally discussing the idea of "Icons", how we define an "icon", specifically considering the four in this series. I then asked how the group thought about when thinking of Eleanor Roosevelt (ER) before they read the book and they if or how their thinking was affected by the biography. The discussion quickly took on a life of its own and went in a myriad of directions. Some of us, myself, for one) tend to think of the older ER, when she had acquired the power and influence without thinking of the journey she took to get there. This volume was really more about that journey.

In our discussion, the opportunity presented itself to talk about the biographer and how a biography will often indirectly reveal as much about the biographer as about the subject. We considered the lens (as a strong liberal feminist and a lesbian) through which Blanche Wiesen Cook views ER and how that influenced her choices and interpretations, granting that she (Cook) is a credible biographer who researches thoroughly and, when appropriate, acknowledges that she is drawing conclusions that others may not about ER. She says that as a biographer "you're not only writing about a life, you're writing about the times." We appreciated the breath of her study of ER and the period.

I asked if the group felt that Cook idealized ER (they definitely didn't) which led us to discuss the contradictions in ER herself. She didn't seem to be a 'good' mother in spite of her renowned sense of compassion; many who were close to her saw her moodiness and tendency to withdraw; she wouldn't/couldn't stand up to her mother-in-law; and so on. We found it interesting that throughout her life, she idealized her father in spite of all evidence to indicate how undeserving he was. We talked at length about her relationship with FDR and how it changed and evolved throughout their lives. Certainly we talked about the many causes she espoused and the changes she helped bring in terms of social justice. We looked at the forces she brought to bear in facilitating the changes in society.

We had a long discussion, in spite of the weather, and it didn't ever wane. I think we all left feeling there was much more to talk about. No matter how one feels about ER, no one can dispute her status as an American icon. A few of the participants have already ordered Volume 2, so I think we'll hear more about Eleanor in the future. Next month we move on the Johnny Cash -- now there's a contrast!

Norleen Healy

Nine people gathered at the Rocky Mountain Manor in Powell to discuss "Eleanor Roosevelt, Vol. 1: 1884-1933" by Blanche Wiesen Cook as part of the Icon Reading Series. This was a biography which focused on Roosevelt's earlier life before her husband, Franklin Roosevelt, became President of the United States. The readers agreed that this was very well-researched story of her life up to that point. Some members of the group believed that too much detail sometimes obscured her story; maybe some of the details and footnotes could be reduced to focus on key events. The group unanimously

agreed that Eleanor Roosevelt was a dynamic person. Much of this volume focused on Eleanor's relationship with her mother-in-law, which was difficult. Many in the discussion group commented on the strangeness of the actions of Eleanor's mother-in-law. We also discussed Eleanor's independence and influence, which came at a time when there was still a great divide between men and women in terms of equality. Despite obstacles, she achieved much for women's rights, child labor laws, unions, worker's rights, and much more. We listed a number of ways in which Eleanor greatly influenced America on social, political, and cultural levels. In fact, when we started to list her contributions, it was difficult for us to name any other woman or man who had had such a far ranging impact on America in the 20th Century. We spent much of the time discussing her personal life, which, thanks to the specific research, was out in the open. Group members believed that too much information was made public, and that even public figures have a right to have some personal moments remain private.

Michael Konsmo

Eleven readers gathered to discuss Eleanor Roosevelt. We began by defining icons and discussing what makes the personalities in this book series icons. I suggested that the reason ER is considered an icon may (I think it has) have changed over the decades. From helpmate to FDR and a lady, ER has become a feminist and a politician in her own right. I spent a fair amount of time on the author's biography, her reasons for writing the book, and her political and gender views. Volume I (Two has been published and Three is being written) was very controversial. Cook argues that the controversy died down in the decade between the two books, suggesting a change in attitude toward homosexuality. I explained why feminists would consider ER's involvements crucial to understanding her as a whole person - in a phrase, the personal is political. The rest of our two hour conversation was wide ranging and included why Cooke did so little with ER's relationships with her children, her own childhood, the importance of FDR's affair in provoking ER's life changes, and her relationships with FDR, friends, Sara, Earl, and finally Hickock. Several people commented on how this book was such a good means of learning history of early 20th century New York social structure, social welfare and political movements in the 1920s, Democratic party politics of the time, and the relative personal freedom of political figures as witnessed by FDR's time as governor and then as president. How Hillary Clinton and later Michelle Obama must feel constrained by the constant media presence. We ended by speculating on the sources of ER's strengths and her contributions to our country and the world. Those who hadn't finished the book asked to keep it and return soon - a good vote for a good and educational read.

Barbara Gose

Twelve readers came tonight to discuss ER's life and times from the 1880s to FDR's first inaugural. I started with biographical information. There is a lot of material available on the author, including an excellent interview with her following the publication of volume two or her projected three volume bio of ER. It's important to know that 1) she is a lesbian, 2) she is a liberal and progressive and involved in like causes and 3) she exposes secrecy and doesn't believe in adding anything to a biography that she can't document. We proceeded to talk about whether or not ER's sexual identity and activity was important to her biography. We decided that it is, that we can't get a complete picture of Roosevelt's evolution into a fully active humanist/author/politician without knowing what she cared about, wanted from life, did in her private life. We then compared the amount of privacy Roosevelt enjoyed compared to modern first ladies. People talked about FDR and Sarah Roosevelt and their relationships with Eleanor. And we talked about FDR, Sarah and Eleanor and the children/grandchildren. I asked how the group thought Eleanor remade herself after the Lucy Mercer affair and Franklin's part in this. That led to a spirited discussion of their unique marriage. From there we moved back to Eleanor's childhood and the social class structure in New York at that time. Eleanor as a bridge between the 19th and 20 century, in terms of women crusaders, is important, as is her developing activism during the 1920s. Finally, we ended with a discussion of ER as an icon and how the public's perception of her has changed as we learn more about her life. We all loved the book and decided we could spend another two hours discussing it. Can Johnny Cash match this? Stay tuned.

Barbara Gose

While everyone agreed that the book took commitment to get through, they also agreed that it was a worthwhile effort. Our discussion veered off in many directions. I did initially give some background on Blanche Wiesen Cook and asked if they could see any of her bias in the biography. Everyone felt that it was well researched and, even when Cook was offering conjecture, it was backed with evidence. I explained that, according to Cook, ER has traditionally been presented as a devoted wife, a helpmate, and not as an independent person, and that her (Cook's) purpose was to show the enormous influence in so many spheres far beyond her role as the President's wife that Eleanor actually had.

I asked the group to think about which events in Eleanor's life shaped her. In this context, we discussed her upbringing, the period at the Allenwood School in London, her marriage (certainly her reaction to learning of FDR's affair with Lucy Mercer), and her teaching at Todhunter as being formative experiences. We talked about the many movements that ER became part of (women's movement, peace movement, racial justice, immigration in the 1930's and 1940's).

We appreciated that the biography did not try to idealize Eleanor, but instead presented her as a complex woman.

We talked about at the long period and some of the significant events in America during which FDR (and Eleanor) were cultural forces.

The group certainly allowed that ER could be considered an American "icon" though someone questioned how many younger people had any association with what she did and represented to the culture. We segued into quite a discussion about President's wives (agreeing that ER and Jackie Kennedy were probably the most "iconic"). Someone suggested that a WCH series of biographies on President's wives would be interesting :).

Norleen Healy

Last Friday afternoon, 5 of us met in the Baggs Library to discuss the first volume of Blanche Wiesen Cook's study of Eleanor Roosevelt. Not everyone had finished the book, but we had a lively discussion anyway. We discussed Cook's view of Eleanor, and discussed two types of biography: 1) the "Great Man" approach – how the character influenced history, and 2) the person as influenced by the forces of history and life's effects. We decided that Eleanor, although of course influenced by her lonely upbringing and the early death of her parents, was more the first type, the type who influences history. Eleanor Roosevelt was an amazing person; despite her personal insecurities, she was kind to everyone, even her annoying and spiteful cousin Alice, and did not return injury for injury, but rather forgave and enabled those she touched.

We compared her with other first ladies, and felt she was in a class of her own. She and Jackie Kennedy were icons, admired by most Americans. However, Eleanor Roosevelt accomplished so many more good works. We felt a better comparison would be with Hillary Clinton, another competent, politically minded first lady. Eleanor performed nobly as a wife, as a political helpmeet for her husband, as a daughter-in-law to the interfering Sarah, who could not bear to be left out of her son's life, as a mentor for students and friends. Her love and mentoring for her husband's second secretary/mistress, Missy, was impressive. I think we were all relieved to find the loves that Eleanor discovered in her later married life; we felt she deserved devoted love, supportive friendship, and joy!

Mary Karen Solomon

A Moveable Feast **by Ernest Hemingway**

Ernest Hemingway's *A MOVEABLE FEAST* was the final of our series of *ICONS*. Since many of them had not read any other Hemingway, they were not making comparisons to his other writings. The setting of Paris in the twenties was not really familiar nor was the idea of the expatriates, who were not widely read in this group. We talked about Hemingway as a persona, becoming a legend as great or greater than his works. Some comparison was made of the expatriates and the *Elite 400* in the Eleanor

Roosevelt book, as neither had a realistic view of what was going on. Each of us chose a favorite of the stories in the collection and talked about it. The discussion was lively about the lifestyles - alcohol, sexual patterns, political thinking, economy of U. S. compared to Europe-of the many people he wrote about.

The history of the era and how many of these characters ended up was information filled in around the stories themselves. The personality of Hemingway - his early life and the relationships with family - and his career and ultimate suicide were also a part of our perspective. Hemingway did not gain many fans in this group, however some of the style he used was appreciated and his ability to cut through to a fact which kept him from writing pages and pages of drivel was appreciated.

All in all, it was a very interesting discussion and ended our series well.

Elouise Rossler, Discussion leader

12 people met to discuss this, the last book in the American Icons series. I gave some biographical details about Hemingway including "the rest of the story (and wives)" after those early years in Paris. While several in the group had read others of Hemingway's works, most found this one difficult to stay with because of its structure. We talked about that whole artistic culture in Paris between World War 1 and 2 and a bit about modernism and what so many of the artists and writers were reacting to. We discussed how Hemingway fit into this and what his legacy is in contemporary American literature. Most recognized the hard boiled, macho, man-of-a-few-words type that emanated from Hemingway's writing and became so prevalent in our American literature and films.

We agreed that Hemingway really did commit himself to his art in those early years, and we felt that he looked back at those years as the best and most productive of his writing life.

A couple of people said their favorite part of the book was the whole atmosphere in Paris at that time. Several people in the group have been to Paris and wished there had been a map included in the book to help the reader locate the places he described.

Even those who didn't care for his writing or had read much of it agreed that there is little doubt about his 'iconic' status, maybe more for his persona than his literature. Some of the group said reading this book made them want to read some of his novels. A couple of us had just finished reading *The Paris Wife*, a new novel written mostly from the point of view of Hadley during those Paris years, and found it to be a fascinating and well researched companion piece to *A Moveable Feast*.

We wrapped up a long and rather fluid discussion by talking about the series as a whole. Everyone agreed that they had read books they probably would never have otherwise and that they were glad that they were "forced" to do so. I thought that the series was valuable in giving

us a lot of opportunity to look at major events in 20th century America through the perspective of these "icons".

Norleen Healy

And it truly was a Moveable Feast of the mind last Friday (9/23) in Baggs. It was a busy day, and only five of us met to discuss Ernest Hemingway's unfinished memoir, [A Moveable Feast](#). We were accidentally locked out of the library, so we meet outside on the lawn, in the afternoon sun. It was a gorgeous fall day, and our discussion was lively and moved along.

I had read [A Moveable Feast](#) in its first edition several decades ago, and I was surprised to recognize how different this edition was. When compiling the memoir, the first publishers had used earlier, less compassionate drafts of Hemingway's experience with Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald and Gertrude Stein. This later edition was compiled using Hemingway's latest revisions by his son Patrick and grandson Sean, and they did a much better job of it, in my opinion. It was more consistent in tone, more logically organized, and included several other essays on the topics and the times by Hemingway, which had not been included in the first edition. Truly, the first edition is low in calories compared to this Moveable Feast.

From a much more mature viewpoint, I found Hemingway's observations and memories both more interesting and kinder than I remembered. His relationship, as a new arrival and a would-be writer, with Gertrude Stein, the doyen of the lost generation in Paris, is retiring and careful, but revealing to the reader. Gertrude's arrogance and paternalism (maternalism just doesn't fit) is annoying, and must have been difficult for the young Hemingway to deal with. And F. Scott Fitzgerald, trying to surpass *The Great Gatsby* while distracted and discouraged by Zelda, was obviously a difficult friend. Hemingway's account of a journey by convertible sports car (in heavy rain) from Lyons to Paris makes great reading but would have been both exhausting and annoying! Our group had many questions and comments concerning Hemingway's marriages, his famously macho pursuits, which some suggested was perhaps a front to hide some masculine insecurity and gender-bending practices.

Hemingway has been in the news lately, too, as his granddaughter Mariel and great-granddaughter, Mariel's younger daughter Langley Crisman, were photographed and interviewed by *Town and Country* for the October issue. And *Vanity Fair* last month ran an article about a new trove of Hemingway's letters, released to a team of his publishers. It is encouraging to know there is more information about Hemingway and his relations with wives, family, and friends to come!

Mary Karen Solomon

We met at our local library and the agenda was to discuss Ernest Hemingway's memoirs in *A Moveable Feast*.

We began by discussing his remarks in the beginning of the book, "If the reader prefers, this may be regarded as fiction. But there is always a chance that such a book of fiction may throw some light on what has been written as fact." What does he mean? Some of us thought that he was simply saying that when we write from memory or tell a story there are always changes that are made to the story whether intentional or not. This was likened to siblings telling a story at a family reunion and telling it very differently, even though they were both there to witness it. We all remembered similar occasions in our own family. Others wondered if his comments in the Preface were meant to cover for the unflattering descriptions of the people in his stories from Paris.

This led us into a long discussion about Hemingway's faults which are well known and don't really need to be delved into here. But it made for lively banter and led us to wonder about young men returning from wars and how witnessing death and destruction often makes one live life as though there is no tomorrow. Seeing so many tomorrows cut short would do that to a person we supposed. The idea of "The Lost Generation" came up and we discussed the expatriate population in Paris that Hemingway caroused with and the devil may care attitude that many of these eccentric people had. Some names were dropped about local people who would have fit into the Paris expat scene of the 1920's.

The group spent a good deal of time discussing the funny scene where Hemingway goes with Scott Fitzgerald to pick up his car and drive it back to France. The car had been left there because the Fitzgerald's had the roof cut off because it was damaged. Then they were not able to drive it all the way back to Paris because of the rain that came down on them since the roof was gone. Fitzgerald talks Hemingway into going with him to pick up the car and then Scott doesn't even make the train. Finally when he gets there Fitzgerald languishes in the hotel and complains and wants his temperature taken. The way Hemingway tells it was very funny and makes one wonder why he hung out with him at all. We also laughed about how Fitzgerald hated the French and yet brought his French chauffeur to the states to drive him around. Then when the chauffeur wanted to check the oil he would yell at his driver that his American car didn't need the oil checked like the French cars did. The artists Hemingway hung around with were so dramatic.

We finished our discussion with some things off of my list. Like what did Hemingway mean by the "Pilot Fish" that leads the rich to the cool places and then he himself gets rich. Was he referring to particular person that ruined Paris for the poor artists? Was it a new tourism sort of phenomenon? I guess only he knows and that is the way it should be I suppose.

We had fun wondering about and filling in the spaces that Hemingway had left in his memoirs of Paris. That is the fun of coming together on a snowy night to discuss a common read, we get to share in common understandings

and in questions that may have no distinct answers, and we not only learn about the writer but we also learn about our neighbors.

So long from K-town,

Brian Spicer
