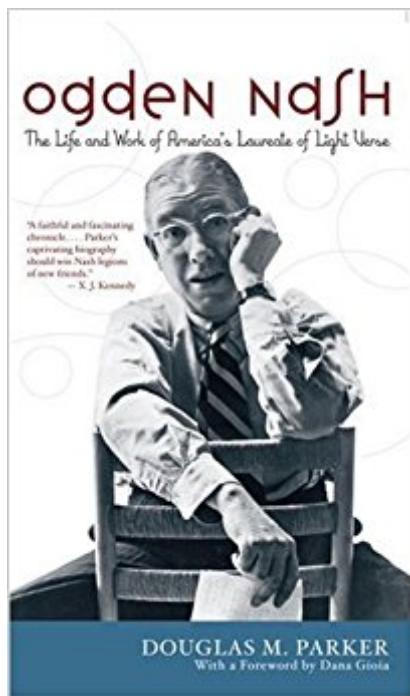


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Ogden Nash: The Life And Work Of America's Laureate Of Light Verse



Synopsis

Candy's dandy
But liquor's quicker.
These inimitable lines could only have been written by Ogden Nash, the American nonpareil of light verse and one of the most remarkable figures in American letters. His keen grasp of human nature and a unique style of verse made him, in the mid-twentieth century, the most widely read and frequently quoted poet of his time. For years, readers have longed for a biography to match Nash's charm, wit, and good nature; now we have it in Douglas Parker's absorbing and delightful life of the poet.

My garden will never make me famous, I'm a horticultural ignoramus, I can't tell a stringbean from a soybean, Or even a girl bean from a boy bean.

Ogden Nash grew up in Savannah, Georgia, went to prep school in Newport, Rhode Island, dropped out of Harvard after his freshman year, and soon after started work as an editor with Doubleday. When he began publishing humorous poems in the *New Yorker*, and later when he worked at the magazine, he became part of the literary circle that included E. B. and Katharine White, Dorothy Parker, Harold Ross, and S. J. Perelman. He went on to publish more than two dozen books of verse as well as screenplays, lyrics and scripts for the theater, children's stories, and essays. Douglas Parker, who has had exclusive access to family letters and diaries, and permission to quote liberally from them and from Nash's poems, has written a warm and inviting biography of the poet who reveled in pure whimsy and wordplay, but who was applauded by his more serious contemporaries. With 12 black-and-white photographs.

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Customer Reviews

The life of the man who is fondly remembered for his verse "Candy/Is dandy/ But liquor/Is quicker" was often anything but dandy, according to his assiduous biographer. Ogden Nash's (1902-1971) genteel Southern heritage and one year at Harvard (due to his father's financial reverses) provided him with literary aspirations that led him to fear his jaunty, pun-filled, gently satiric verse was not real poetry. Even after acclaim greeted his frequent publication in the New Yorker, finances forced him to leave his beloved (and temperamental) wife and two daughters to go on the road as a lecturer and performer, where he often suffered bouts of intestinal illness and depression. His yearning for a career in musical theater was briefly (if memorably) fulfilled when he provided the lyrics for Kurt Weill's classic "Speak Low." Gratification came from unexpected sources, however, including a lifelong friendship with S.J. Perelman and the praise of W.H. Auden. Parker, a retired lawyer writing with the Nash family's cooperation, provides numerous examples of Nash's distinctive poetry, his wit underscored by gentle social commentary, antic wordplay and rhyme and meter that seemed random but was meticulously composed. Parker's is a useful, highly readable biography of one of America's best-loved poets. Photos. 12 b&w photos not seen by PW. (Apr. 29) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Adult/High School
Parker paints a picture of a kind, loving man who made words and wordplay fun and entertaining. Even at the age of 10, Nash possessed a talent and an ability to use language cleverly. In 1930, Nash's poems made their appearance in the New Yorker, and this funny, talented writer became part of a literary landscape that included such luminaries as Dorothy Parker and S. J. Perelman. At first glance, Nash's verses seem simple, and yet they are filled with witty lines and twists on spelling. He liked to write about families, and no one was safe from his gentle satire, not even his beloved wife, Frances. Nash told the truth about the ordinary and, in doing so, endeared himself to a lifetime of readers. Would-be poets and satirists as well as students interested in the artistic milieu of the times will enjoy reading this well-written tribute.

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As I am in the middle of reading two other books, I've only scanned and read a bit of this book but what I've read has been delightful and interesting. Nash was a marvelously interesting man with an equally interesting life. As a child, I so enjoyed reading verse and limericks. From about age 7 or 8, I

knew when I saw his name as author, I was in for some laughter and brain tickling reading. Doug Parker's book is a delightful exposé of the life & times of the man behind those clever verses. I'm looking forward to reading the entire book.

Leave Ogden Nash's poetry, wanted to know more about him.s

Douglas Parker's book is a wonderful biography of Ogden Nash, an important American poet. Nash's name may no longer be commonplace in many American homes; if so, Parker's book will go a long way in restoring Nash's name among the elite of American poets. Parker carefully presents Nash's life in chronological sequence, highlighting the influences and experiences that shaped his work. Throughout Parker liberally draws Nash's poetry into his story to allow Nash to speak for himself. The result is a book in which Nash's personality and talent rise to the surface and Parker's voice recedes into the background. I enjoyed the book very much and recommend it to anyone interested in learning about Ogden Nash and his role in 20th c. literature.

Great inside view of this wonderful humorist.

Ogden Nash: The Life and Work of America's Laureate of Light Verse led me to expect some of the famous Nash verses but it was a biography only so had to order a separate book of verses. Still think of him as the master of light verse!

The philosopher poet, Ogden Nash, Though born and wed to privilege, was throughout his lifetime frightfully far from bogged in cash(Or at least he so lamented). Doug Parker says, while assuring us his penury never quite prevented Nash from keeping house or houses Servant-staffed while traveling in luxury with wife and kids and friends with kids and spouses. Though his efforts yielded flops In Hollywood and Broadway ventures, rhymes he wrote for glossies and anthologies and his hops Around the lecture circuit(Which, though ruinous To his fragile health, he never would quite shirk it) Kept his ledger black enough. Indeed, couplets comparing the speed of bonbons versus bourbon and similar wacky stuff(Like rhymes that ridiculed A bluenosed "Ut" named Smoot whose Senate stint by tariff acts and smiting smut was fueled) Consistently kept Mr. Nash `n' Fran `n' Lin `n' Isabel (his wife and daughters) living in quite comfy fashion. Nash's life was not a bore, But Parker's grand obsession With minutia made me often want to holler "Less is more!" And, moreover, many others' In the story, though tangential, Had lives of greater interest were I to voice my `druthers.:-)

stanwhjr -

Loved the book. Ogden Nash? Not so much. As a little boy I loved his verses and would browse through THE NEW YORKER slapping the pages from left to right to see if they were carrying a new Nash poem that week. Often as not, they were, then I'd be happy, crawling away toward my treehouse to memorize his goofy sense of humor and his sophisticated attitude towards marriage. I can see how, without Ogden Nash, there might never have been a Stephen Sondheim. Parker is his ideal biographer. Obviously he had a lot of assistance from Nash's two enigmatic daughters, Linell and Isabel, whose photographs make them look like two grave Snow Whites. And yet he is not afraid to call a spade a spade, and we get the picture that the mother of these two girls, Frances, was often a Xanthippe for reasons unknown. It's great that Parker did so much work towards reconstructing Nash's other life as a Broadway lyricist, and I'm sure that his account of Nash's work with Kurt Weill and with Vernon Duke will never be excelled. He doesn't really pay much attention to the Hollywood work, however, and I don't know if he even bothered screening the Jeanette MacDonald starrer THE FIREFLY (co-written with Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett), which is nothing short of excellent. The story gets grim as Nash ages and his career takes a nosedive. You get to despise Roger Angell, Nash's editor at THE NEW YORKER, for being such an obsequious Uriah Heep, even when he's rejecting Nash's latest efforts. It's like he delights in kicking Nash's butt while kissing it at the same time. Nash seems aware of Angell's double nature, but doesn't really know what to do about it. THE NEW YORKER seems like a velvet trap--can't live without it, but it tears you to pieces inside. I also enjoyed reading the parodies or pastiches of Nash's verse that Parker has collected from all different sources, from Dorothy Parker to Scott Fitzgerald, everyone wanted a piece of the man. To top it all off, Dorothy Lamour got upset with Nash and laid into him with both barrels, when he wrote a poem for her to read on the air that contained the word "conundrum." She thought it risqué, perhaps confusing it with "condom," and refused to save her reputation. Furious, she lashed out, "If you don't think I know what that word means--and that I'll be fool enough to say it on the air--you're crazy! I wasn't born yesterday!" Nash wrote to Frances, "she's very pleasant but as dumb as you would imagine." (Not as bad as his opinion of poor Ginger Rogers: "coarse, painted, dyed.")

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