

THE GREAT WORSIFIER

By Fred Hobbs

Fine poetry and the writers who create it is a largely subjective matter. Some poets have reached the status of immortals whose works have endured over the ages. Poets have written on thoughts or subjects with deep philosophical meanings; others have penned soaring epics or tender expressions of everlasting love. Lovers of poetry may rightfully honor the talent of poets such as Percy Bysshe Shelley or John Keats, but here's to an equally esteemed member of the literati, America's clever creator of wit and whimsy, Ogden Nash.

He was the writer of such gems as this one about a New Year's Day morning:

In an era opened by mistake
I'd rather sleep than be awake,
Indeed, at times I can't recall
Why ever I woke up at all."
About his garden, Nash wrote:
"Say not Eve needed Adam's pardon
For their eviction from the Garden;
I only hope some power divine
Gets round to ousting me from mine.

And, of course, the very well-known, short and pointed advice to male suitors: "candy is dandy, but liquor is quicker."

At the beginning of his entry to the field of work, Nash held a variety of jobs, including as a school teacher, and briefly as a Wall Street bond salesman. Reportedly, he sold only one bond—to his grandmother—before abandoning that pursuit. Then he was hired as an advertising copywriter for streetcar signs. That first writing job led to positions in a New York publishing house, including as a manuscript reader. The poor quality of some of those submissions convinced Nash he could produce better material.

As a biographical sketch on *Google* indicates, Nash tried to create serious verse ala Shelley and Keats, but struggled with that pursuit. He preferred to scribble comic verse on pages that he crumpled and tossed across the office to desks of co-workers. Eventually, one of his works, a poem about his early life, was published in the popular and prestigious *New Yorker* magazine.

A compilation of his verses appear in a three-book set under the titles, "Versus", "I'm a Stranger Here Myself" and "The Private Dining Room." Nash wrote three Hollywood screenplays, and scripts for television productions "Peter and the Wolf" and "The Sorcerer's Apprentice." Working with another well-known writer,

S. J. Perelman, he provided material for the Broadway musical hit, "One Touch of Venus."

Nash's ability to poke fun at politicians and the foibles of American society drew praise and laughter from many, but some of the literary elite bemoaned the liberties he took with spelling and rhyme: "If called by a panther, don't anther" or these lines from his poem about a hat maker:

"Are you sure it is a hat?
And if so, what was the matter with the hatter?
I hope he made a lot of them,
That dozens he has got of them;
I hope he has a harem,
And all his spouses warem."

To his critics, Nash is said to have replied: "I'm not a versifier, I'm just a worsifer."