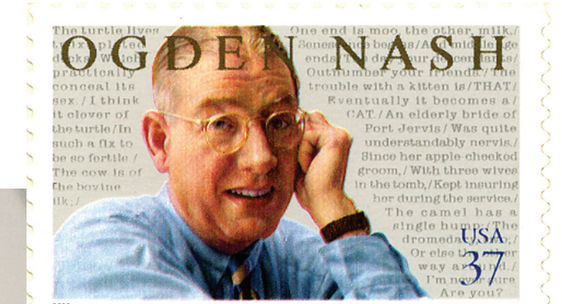
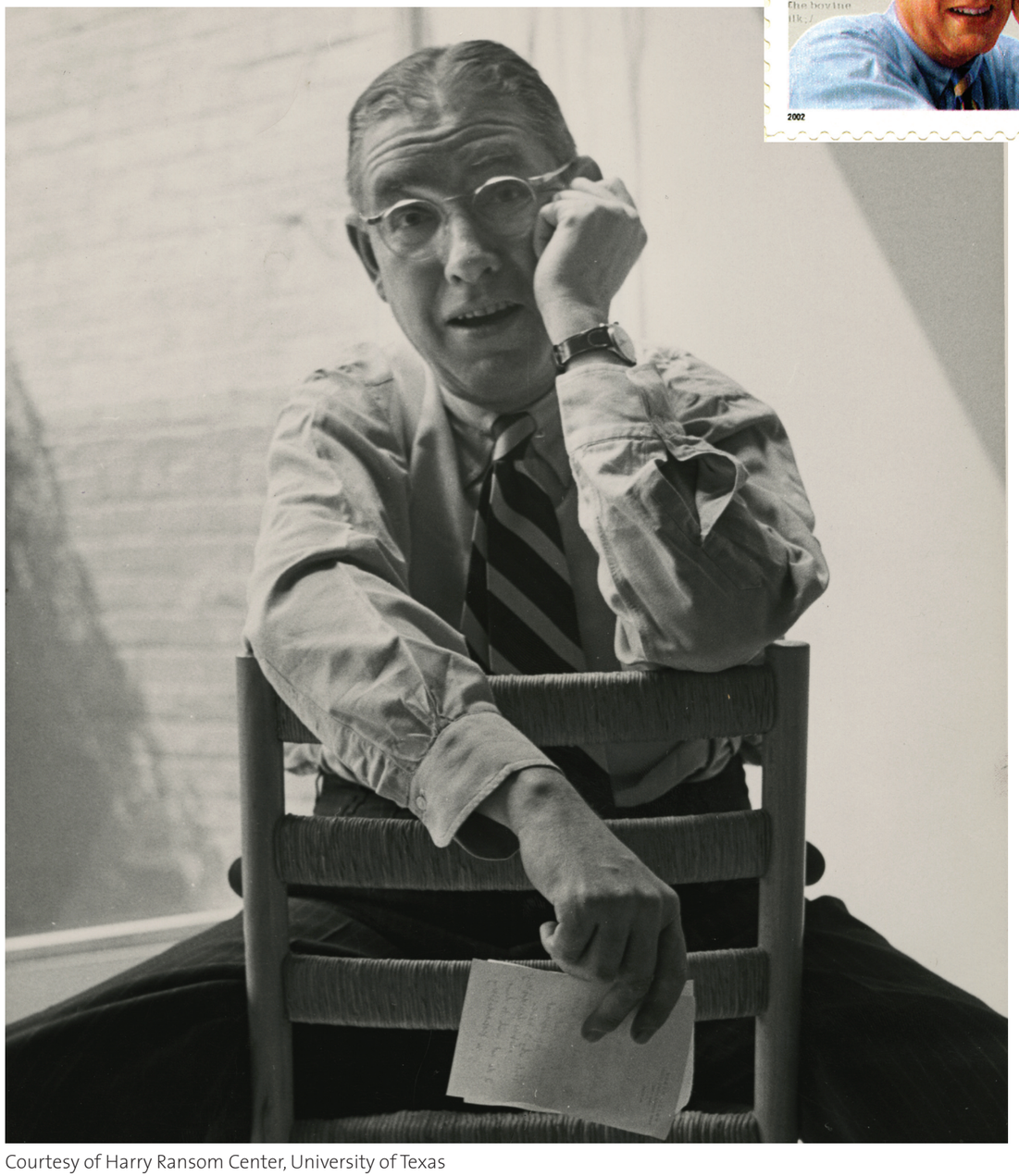
Ogden Nash

Poet (1902 – 1971)





Courtesy of Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas

Frederic Ogden Nash was an acknowledged master of light verse. The New York Times said his "droll verse with its unconventional rhymes made him the country's best-known producer of humorous poetry."

Nash was born in Rye, New York and graduated from St. George's School in Middletown, RI. He spent a year at Harvard in 1920 before dropping out and working his way through a series of odd jobs. He eventually landed a position as a manuscript reader at Doubleday & Company, where he first began to write poetry. He contributed verses to several magazines, including *The New Yorker*, whose editorial staff he later joined.

Nash moved to Baltimore three years after marrying Frances Leonard, a Baltimore native. He lived in Baltimore from 1934 until his death in 1971. After his return from a brief move to New York, he wrote "I could have loved New York had I not loved Balti-more." [editor's note: Nash joined the Century as a Resident member in 1960.]

In 1931, he published his first collection of poems, *Hard Lines*, earning him national recognition. That was followed by 19 more collections including *Bad Parents' Garden of Verse*, *The Face is Familiar*, *Musical Zoo*, and *Parents Keep Out*. His outrageous rhymes and manic scansions gave us such poems as his classic "Reflections on Ice Breaking":

> Candy is
> Dandy.
> But liquor
> Is quicker.

He was partial to limericks, an example of which is "Arthur"

> There was an old man of Calcutta,
> Who coated his tonsils with butta,
> Thus converting his snore
> From a thunderous roar
> To a soft, oleaginous mutta.

The critic MORRIS BISHOP, when reviewing Nash's 1962 *Everyone But Thee and Me*, offered up this lyrical commentary on Nash's style:

> Free from flashiness, free from trashiness
> Is the essence of ogdenashiness.
> Rich, original, rash and rational
> Stands the monument ogdenational!

Nash was the lyricist for the 1943 Broadway musical *One Touch of Venus*, collaborating with librettist S. J. Perelman and composer Kurt Weill. The show included the notable song "Speak Low." Nash died of heart failure at Johns Hopkins Hospital on May 19, 1971.