

5 Paraphrase tends to turn every poem into weak allegory. It summarizes, or states an idea or proposition that can be detached from the poem. It probably provides a comfortable feeling of clarity or purpose, especially for rather direct poems. But mostly it simply abandons the poem and steps out into the one-dimensional world of clichés and ad men and reducing salons. If a poem is memorable it creates itself over and over again in its own saying.

6 I've written poems that are clearer than *Routes*, poems that stay closer to their occasions. I'm less and less interested in certain ways of narrating and informing. One desires to break away from personal limits and formulas that proved adequate. I don't know how good a poem *Routes* is; I like it because it still retains for me something of that desire. Next month I may decide this is another illusion.

---

**Peter Everwine** was born in Detroit in 1930 and grew up in western Pennsylvania. His published work includes *In the House of Light* (1970) and *Collecting the Animals* (1973) which won the Lamont Award. He teaches at California State University, Fresno, and currently is a Guggenheim Fellow.

# Robert Francis



## SILENT POEM

backroad leafmold stonewall chipmunk  
underbrush grapevine woodchuck shadblow

woodsmoke cowbarn honeysuckle woodpile  
sawhorse bucksaw outhouse wellsweep

backdoor flagstone bulkhead buttermilk  
candlestick ragrug firedog brownbread

hilltop outcrop cowbell buttercup  
whetstone thunderstorm pitchfork steeplebush

gristmill millstone cornmeal waterwheel  
watercress buckwheat firefly jewelweed

gravestone groundpine windbreak bedrock  
weathercock snowfall starlight cockrow



A fascination with words, single words or groups of words, has been the origin of a number of my recent poems. *Hogwash*, for instance, and *Condor* (Candor).

I became so fond of the strong character of solid compounds ("back-road," "stonewall," etc.) that I made a list purely for my pleasure. In time I wanted to make a poem out of these words, fitting them together like a patchwork quilt. In so doing I saw I could paint a picture of old-time New England, a picture moving from wildwood to dwelling, outdoors and in, then out and up to pasture and down to millstream.

At the time of writing I was exploring a technique new to me, which I call "fragmented surface." By this I mean a poem made up not of sentences but of short phrases, grammatically unconnected but emotionally focused. This poem of solid compounds differs from the others by consisting of single words rather than short phrases.

Feeling the need of some formality in such an informal procedure, I decided to have just four words to a line. Thus, without being quite aware of it at the time, I was making another "word-count" poem, word-count having been an earlier exploration of mine.

For years I had been thinking about the concept of silent poetry or silence in poetry. In this poem by simply presenting words without talking about them, I felt I was gaining a certain silence. Hence the title.

Here, then, is a poem that happens to unite four poetic interests of mine: word-count, fragmented surface, silent poetry, and words themselves as one source of poetry.

---

Robert Francis was born in 1901, grew up in Massachusetts, and received his bachelor's and master's degrees from Harvard. He has been a teacher of various sorts off-and-on, but is now simply an independent writer. He has published many poetry books: *Stand With Me Here* (1936), *Valhalla and Other Poems* (1938), *The Sound I Listened For* (1944), *The Face Against the Glass* (1948), *The Orb Weaver* (1960), *Come*

*Out Into the Sun* (1965), *Like Ghosts of Eagles* (1974), and *Collected Poems: 1936-1976* (1976). He has also written a novel, *We Fly Away* (1948), his autobiography, *The Trouble With Francis* (1971), and *Memoirs, Frost: A Time to Talk* (1972). He has recorded *Robert Francis Reads His Poems* (1975). He has been the recipient of major poetry awards and fellowships for the past thirty-five years.