

## POEMS

### Visions of Desolation: Cleveland 1965 Austin 2012

Thomas G. Palaima

*Ecce homunculus.*

This new blank document  
could remain blank  
for all I care  
to reveal or conceal.

Ask me.  
I ain't sayin'.  
Coax me.  
My lips are sealed.

I could turn myself inside out.  
My soul could slowly spin about.

Spin? Turn? Rotate? Whirl?  
Like a chicken on a spit?  
Like coffee in a microwave?  
Like a top? A dervish? A compact disc?  
A vinyl record from my youth?

What would you like me to play?

The needle in the groove works

its wonder in high fidelity,  
but faithful to the max to what?

The songs from cheap speakers,  
two-bit, sentimental,  
still sound good to me.

But who cares?

If I stood naked, who would hear?

My dried voice  
is more than quiet  
and less than meaningless.

Not a whimper.

“Peanuts, here, four bags for a quarter.”

“Buy your rags from Daddy Wags!”

A naïve young  
Roman Catholic boy,  
Lithuanian-Polish,  
thirteen going on ten,  
by way of the CTS  
(Cleveland Transit System)  
Number 35  
—“Trowbridge next!” —

after eighteen miles  
and fifty minutes  
of fading storefronts  
run-down bars  
reading the same  
soon-to-vanish  
lexicon of Polish,  
Czech, Hungarian,  
Irish, Croatian  
and now Puerto Rican  
names,  
steps off  
at Lorain Avenue  
and 25<sup>th</sup> Street,  
walks from the West Side Market  
five blighted city blocks  
to the red-brick Jesuit high school,  
and sits among other boys,  
among, but not with.

What was that shell,  
what kind of envelope  
kept him sound,  
and soundless?

Move, move, move,  
you splendid little machine.

Not quite a robot.

What did Eliot really know  
about the butt ends of days?

Who can count  
the butt ends  
of the ways  
that life can play  
blind man's bluff  
with your soul,  
and for keeps?

There isn't even any key chain.