

**‘Vaudeville’: Poem
For Russell Haley 1934-2016**

Murray Edmond

That fine cotton shirt you purchased in New Lynn
that buttons in the Chinese style
makes you look like Phil Roth or Jo Heller.
How come no one seems to know that you’re not dead?
In the kitchen your father’s lying in a drawer when you open it.
He sits up bolt and draws his pipe and says, “Now, lad!”
Your mother lifts your shirt and slaps a pancake on your belly.
The play tonight is called *Unshelled*.
It comes in three parts like a kitset motor or the map of Yorkshire.
The instructions simply read: ANY PART CAN GO WITH ANY OTHER.
After hours a waitress sings with mop as microphone.
An alderman enters and plays the violin.
There’s a beetle seated at a desk typing out a memoir of his army years.
A solo sex scene is accompanied by selected lines from Robert Frost.
In the years before the Miners’ Strike
an old man on a bike rides across the West Riding.
His repetitive attempts to recite George Eliot’s instructions on how to be a novelist
are thwarted by the wind.
It’s hard to catch the words as they fly about along with hats and bills of fare.
You lean in close and whisper in my ear:
“Look to your right
at that ugly troglodyte –
in the stalls the clientele are better than the show tonight.”