

...june 3, 1991...

he said he had to telephone  
to talk to someone from the past  
since only an oldham-er could understand –  
would really understand the way he thought –  
(he and his wife – both oldham born  
had twenty years of married life  
before the london move) –

he worked at the factory  
and beth worked in a near café –  
oh yes – the flat was fine  
and finances survived  
so long as no one spent the money earned –  
but what he had to say –  
almost unbelievable  
was beth had left him for another man –  
not only that –  
but this other man – a cafe regular –  
was more than seventy –

no – not rich – but after all  
beth's really not that kind –  
they had their names down  
for a council flat somewhere –  
it was only yesterday  
while walking in the rain  
he saw the old man at the bus stop  
and went over  
wanting to tell him that he didn't understand  
the selfishness of someone  
who could steal his wife away –

the old man listened and raised his cane  
beside an angry voice –  
*you're the selfish one – he said  
begrudging me some company –  
look at yourself – still young and full of health –  
look at me – a cancerous seventy –  
maybe three years to live –  
you have your life ahead of you  
and you can have your wife back when i'm dead.*

only an oldham-er could understand  
and not laugh away the emptiness –  
yes – he loved beth still –  
perhaps she would come back someday –  
what else could he say?