**Capital**

*“How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,**Your loop'd and window'd raggedness, defend you**From seasons such as these?”*

– *King Lear, III.IV; Shakespeare*

By morning’s clear light we learn these names –

*Birdcage, Goldhawk, Mortimer*. In this city’s heart

houses lean and teem, streets run into each other

with talk of mutual friends. To walk down Victoria

is to join a conversation armed with your name

and nation, and the weather. Slowly, we become

used to the stuff of introductions: grace, laughter,

mispronunciation. But the weeks do not change

some basic facts. We gain notice by not alighting

at Leicester; *half-two* is still funny on the tongue.

Afternoons are filled with the absence of corners

where we are stopped, or asked if we have eaten.

The homeless begin their shifts. We count eleven

on Oxford Street, fixed as if at intervals, as many

as cyclists that pass in a minute. Neither at home

nor in a hurry, we veer through stores, until stale

warmth steers us out into the cold. Then the night

comes. In the less distinguishable dark we find

dinner, and our way back east. The buses are full

of invisible crowd. We sleep, and no-one stares.

Days like this, to make home in a permeable city,

we talk to roads, and number the poor. It is not

always like this. Occasionally the heating will fail,

and we go to the library or boil water for a bath.

It is October, and soon we will have to make new

plans, also fix the crack in the door. But for now

these hours are ours, and a city whose distance

is neither our call nor calling. It will be less than

enough, even, to *call it home*. Except on days

that are like this, when that is all there is.