London's Trafalgar Square has been home to four beloved lions since the 1860s. "Londoners" by Craig Taylor explores the diverse experiences of London's inhabitants.

In "Londoners," Taylor paints a narrative portrait of London by allowing about 80 people from all walks of life to tell their stories. His subjects, Taylor acknowledges, "twisted the London A-Z another couple of degrees in their own way." By turns fascinating and cliché-ridden, "Londoners" is, therefore, more successful in laying out diverse (and idiosyncratic) experiences than in capturing the distinctiveness of one of the world's great cities.

For many of the people Taylor interviewed, London is a backdrop, not all that different from any other city, big enough to preserve anonymity or make one feel lonely; cosmopolitan enough to accommodate a Noah's Ark of nationalities, and sufficiently small for a resident to run into a friend at a pub. It is home to cops and street protesters, foot fetishists and funeral directors, a driving instructor and a dominatrix. There "is something that gets you in London," an old-age pensioner tells Taylor. But the best she can do to identify that "something" is to contrast it to "the quiet in the country."

A few of Taylor's Londoners convey its sights, sounds and smells. The banter at Spitalfields market, a trader reveals, includes words spelled backward and rhyming slang. To keep customers in the dark, vendors refer to the price as the "ecirp." The number six is "Tom Mix." A "bottle of blue" is two and "Flo's line" is nine.

According to a street photographer, London, "a place that used to be something," is "sliding into shabbiness." Rubbish is everywhere and many, many street signs are askew. And he observes fewer and fewer children playing on the streets.

As Taylor knows, "Londoners" is "not a definitive portrait." London's essence remains elusive, he implies, because its reality is experienced differently by so many different people. Seen this way,
the collage of cacophonous voices he has assembled does reveal something about this place and time. And, most important, perhaps, all the gabbing, grumbling, boasting and bitching makes you want to join Taylor in "The London Chase," even if you know it will never end.

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