

The following poem is based on a name found at random in the 19th century workhouse records at Southwark Archives.

Greygoose, Johanna

would not have lived in the workhouse but it came
to pass that she knew its darkneses like her own airborne
hair or the inner webs of her work hand with which she traced
a plot of Ireland in the dirt come dusk yes she'd heard
of her sisters tuberous with the need the cold
and their bodies left to melt those stories of an underland
she could not bind with the songs of the self-same world women
flown by spirits of uncertain intent to the greenwood
slid always to the bottom of a bottle so that she could not
hear the words just the bullseye hollowing
like a bell that meant there was somewhere yet to go

but then the rest was a neat trick played on her to an unseen
gallery that is the belly swollen some other way
the child lost and her real name with it she drew
a grey goose with her finger in the common ground
did not find the need to speak now so they called her Stone
Johanna while she worked oakum out of cord there being
nothing else now for her fingers to do and kept the stressed
airs she'd sung to the dying from the rest for fear of diluting
them with waves of working like how when she left
she was not seen again although sometimes was heard
the only words discernible something like a wild goose
in the workhouse and always accompanied
by church work bells
birdcall a child crying
somewhere glass
shattering into flight