

John McCarthy

Samuel's Ear

My mother had two miscarriages
and I was born

with their voices inside my head
trapped like nails in glass cups, pickled

like sheep-children in mason jars,
raising their own kind

out of their own kind, thoughts
and more than thought, thorns,

crowns worn under my skin,
my skull even. When they came

out of the orange light
into yellow and white,

full of red and red everywhere,
the pain of childbirth

having not birthed, never went away,
my mother said. Had they lived,

at least a week, there would be pictures,
hair locks, soiled diapers, but my hand

and the hearing of innervations
drowned in womb-water slosh

muffle through me. Umbilicals
attached to nothing, waving



John McCarthy

like seaweed stuck in cold current,
voices beyond the voice, the language

of a dead child is the absence of crying;
to me it whispers, *come to the edge,*

*that edge you stand on before you fall
out of your mother's legs*

*and breathe,
breathe that thing you call life,*

*that thing of love and dust
gathering when no one's around.*

I sense the two of them
on a shelf named memory,

named no one. I am
Samuel's Ear.

In the middle of the night
I wake up and haunt;

Eli, I call my father,
asking if it was him who called,

asking what mutation made me
the father of my father's children.

