

SIMON COCKLE

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Memory Cento

An elderly man fell off his horse  
in crossing a ford on a winter's night;  
open the head, taking the brains,  
wash, pick and cleanse.

When it is injured, remembrance  
is impaired; salt, pepper and parsley  
the seat of memory, chop the brains fine  
put bye in a cloth.

Ever afterward he could not bring  
to his recollection the names of  
his wife and children: one was called Facey,  
the other Diamond,

and the third, Oblivion, the Child of Cold.  
Facey so thin, the wind would have blown  
her away; sever out the bones,  
cut the skin

(all her flesh was gone). She stared out of her  
great eyes as though she'd seen a ghost—  
at other times, words beginning with a vowel  
cannot be found.

What was more, the fireplace in the kitchen  
was one great pile of wood-ash; clean  
the pot very clean or it will burn too.  
His bad memory

fell from a considerable height  
upon his head. He was bothered with it;  
he could not see how all this had come about.  
One morning he went

into his cowshed, and there he found his  
sweet herbs pulverized, although he did not  
cease to recognize and love them as  
fondly as before.



## ABOUT THE POEM & AUTHOR

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“Memory Cento” by Simon Cockle is composed from: the recipe for dressing a calf’s head in *American Cookery* by Amelia Simmons (1796); the story of “The Three Cows” in *More English Fairy Tales* by Joseph Jacobs and John D. Batten (first published 1893); and a passage on memory and the brain from *Curiosities of Medical Experience* by J. G. Millingen (1839).

Simon writes about the poem and its composition:

“I chose my three sources for a number of reasons. Firstly, I wanted to blend fiction and non-fiction to create a poem where it would be difficult to differentiate between fantasy and reality. Secondly, I tried to find sources that contained different registers of language: old English, archaic terms and formal, scientific low-frequency language. Finally, I chose sources that were thematically linked—memory, loss, sensation—to create a cohesive narrative. Once I pieced together fragments of the sources, I was surprised by the sequence of events they told, and how heart-breaking the conclusion was to this family's story.”

Simon Cockle has published his work in *iOTA*, *London Progressive Journal*, *Pantheon Magazine*, *In Between Hangovers*, and *Poetica Botanica*, as well as in the anthologies *Secrets and Dreams* (Kind of a Hurricane Press 2016) and *Paper Cuts* (Poetry ID 2016). Simon received a master’s degree in education from the University of Hertfordshire and teaches English and poetry; he also edits his school’s literary magazine. He lives in Aston, England. Online at [www.simoncockle.wordpress.com](http://www.simoncockle.wordpress.com).

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