

# Memory and Nijinsky's Last Performance

by Eric Norris (April 2018)



*Blue Window*, Henri Matisse, 1913

Memory

It is an antique system of small weights

And pulleys sealed inside a window frame  
Long painted shut: one where a silly face  
Grins and grimaces. It is not the same

Face for you, but you should recognize  
The basic features: the squashed, greasy nose  
Print left on the pane, the two crossed eyes,  
The pink tip of a tongue thrust so close

Against the surface you can almost taste  
The cold—that lingering ammonia  
Zing. It never quite evaporates—  
That funny flavor. Blue. Millennia

From now, I bet, whatever lights glide past,  
Memories taste sharp like that. Clean glass.



*Nijinsky*, Franz Kline, 1947

## Nijinsky's Last Performance

Let's see. The clouds mirrored the rubble  
Below, hard and dark. So, we danced,  
And drank. A few smoked contraband Luckies,  
Accompanied by me—my balalaika.

We occupied one sector of Vienna.

We passed the awful Molotov grade vodka

Around, to prove we were good comrades. Then,

I was sixteen. I'd drink and I'd turn red—

Scarlet as the star pinned to my cap.

The songs we sang were not political,

Just simple peasant melodies. The sound

Bounced across the cobbles in the square

And up the curb—like a blind man's cane—

Until the music touched this couple—older

People—Russians. I stopped strumming when

They joined us. We had never seen ballet.

He kissed his wife. She held his coat and hat.

Scorched by schizophrenia and war,

His dark eyes sparkled and he smiled, "Play.

I'll show you how to dance on your own grave."

*Impossible Archetype, The Peacock Journal, Classical Outlook, E-Verse Radio, Singapore Poetry, Softblow, Assaracus, Glitterwolf, New Walk Magazine, The Raintown Review, The Goodmen Project, The Nervous Breakdown, and American Arts Quarterly.* His latest book is [Astronomy For Beginners](#).

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