



[Spring in Fialta](#), by Vladimir Nabokov

In A Nutshell

Scholars generally agree that "Spring in Fialta" is Vladimir Nabokov's greatest short story. It is tightly woven, beautifully composed, elaborately intricate, and all around a humbling experience to read. Nabokov himself listed it as one of his favorite works. It explores the adulterous relationship between Victor and Nina, two Russian expatriates who have met by chance dozens of times and in the oddest of ways over the course of fifteen years between 1917 and 1932. The story is told by Victor, who recollects this series of encounters when he bumps into Nina – for the last time – in a seaside tourist town called Fialta.

"Spring in Fialta" was first written in Russian in 1936. Nabokov then translated it into English, and it was published in this form in his collection *Nine Stories* in 1947. Since then, there's been a lot of discussion of "hidden meaning" in the work. Some think the story is about Nabokov's first extra-marital affair. Others claim that it's a veiled exploration of his feelings about his own exile from Russia (Nabokov escaped St. Petersburg during the Bolshevik Revolution in 1919, when it was a violent and not-so-fun time to be in the political center of Russia), and that leading lady Nina is supposed to be the motherland. Many notice that Nabokov explores the same themes in "Spring in Fialta" that crop up in his works time and time again: the nature of memory, the lasting effects of past experiences, the way a person is immortalized through memory after death, and marital infidelity.

Regardless of how you choose to interpret "Spring in Fialta," we promise its prose will knock

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your socks off. So have at it.

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Big Picture Study Questions

- 1 How do the various narrative techniques at work here – memory, magical realism, the disruption of time, unreliable narrator – all work together to form a cohesive whole in "Spring in Fialta"?
- 2 Some people argue that with highly artful works, such as "Spring in Fialta," the art overwhelms the content. That is, we're so busy admiring Nabokov for being a literary god that we can't see the tragedy in Victor's unrequited desire; we're so busy oohing and ahing over the narrative technique (see question one) that we miss the humanity in the characters. Interestingly, *NY Times* Movie Critic "The Carpetbagger" said the same thing about Daniel Day-Lewis's 2008 Oscar-winning performance in *There Will Be Blood*. He was so caught up in the "acting choices" and artful prowess that he couldn't get emotionally invested in the character. What do you think about this argument with respect to "Spring in Fialta?"
- 3 That was quite a question. We're just going to chill out for a minute.

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