

Every Tennis Match is a Ghost Story

Audio commentary of *Wimbledon Writers' Final*:

Martin Amis (GBR) vs. David Foster Wallace (USA)

Partial recording of
‘Every Tennis Match is a Ghost Story’,
 Audio commentary of *Wimbledon Writers' Final*:
 Martin Amis (GBR) vs. David Foster Wallace (USA)

45 minutes and 47 seconds

Recovered from The LesLiu Archives
 Derwent Hall, Derwent, Derbyshire, UK

Acknowledgements

Elsa Canetti, commentator, voiced by Wendy Liu
 Saul Leslie, commentator, voiced by Saul Leslie
 Umpire Madame Emma Bovary, voiced by Valerie Stablo
 Expert contributor Beci Carver
 Researched, written and scripted by Saul Leslie
 Sound design and engineering support by Wendy Liu

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Martin Amis (left) pictured alongside a first edition copy of *Infinite Jest* on the low coffee table by Amis's chair¹. As far as records show, this was as close as Amis and Wallace have come to being in the same room, other than the Writers' Final.

¹ Martin Amis and Christopher Hitchens in Conversation - The Atlantic.
<https://www.theatlantic.com/video/archive/2012/10/martin-amis-and-christopher-hitchens-in-conversation/466842/>

Introduction:

Welcome, dear reader, to the Writers' Final

Wallace: [shrugs] *It'd be fun to hit with Amis sometime. I wouldn't want to do it as a piece – I'd just like to be the best writer-tennis player².*

When David Foster Wallace made this remark to journalist David Lipsky in 1996, he launched his bid to play tennis against British writer Martin Amis on the sacred ground of Wimbledon's Centre Court. This pamphlet provides information about the recorded radio commentary of the tennis match which both writers eventually played, in the Wimbledon Writers' Final. For a long time this recording was assumed to have been lost under the waves of the 'The Drowned Village' of Derwent, a town in Derbyshire, UK, deliberately flooded to make way for a dam. However, a recent exploration of the reservoir revealed a number of materials stored in the submerged remains of Derwent Hall. Once these were recovered, it was found that they included the audio from the Amis-Wallace Wimbledon Writers' Final. This has been restored and presented here.

Literary scholar Saul Leslie is joined in the commentary box by Elsa Canetti, former Wimbledon Writers' champion, novelist, poet, and critic, in this partial recording of the apocryphal tennis match. Amis and Wallace met at Wimbledon when each was at the height of their literary and tennis-playing powers. This was their first and only known encounter on the tennis court.

² p. 55, *Although Of Course You End Up Becoming Yourself*, David Lipsky

History of the Wimbledon Writers' Tournament

Wimbledon began as the All England Lawn Tennis Club in 1877 and has become one of the world's most famous tennis tournaments. Currently, it is the only one of the four Grand Slam competitions played on grass. The Wimbledon Writers' Tournament developed alongside the Grand Slam competition, although it was only in 1922 that the first official WWT took place, culminating in a final between Virginia Woolf and HL Mencken, from which Woolf took the trophy.

In subsequent years there have been many notable matches, including the 1966 final between Jean Rhys and Sylvia Plath, during which the American recited her entire *Ariel* collection as her winners' speech. The 1972 final between Gore Vidal and Norman Mailer famously concluded early when Mailer smashed his racket, incurring a court violation that forfeited his participation in the match. This was largely regarded as a continuation of the feud started on the Dick Cavett Show in December of the previous year.

The turn of the millennium brought with it a new set of contenders and a new style of play, with the likes of Zadie Smith and Ben Lerner developing the hysterical realist forehand which would have such devastating effects on opponents.

We are living through a golden age of writer-tennis playing, and the Amis-Wallace final is one such example. Their comparable writing and tennis style, their contrasting relationships with audience both on and off the page, makes this clash one of great anticipation.

Play.

Writer-player biographies



Martin Amis (GBR)



Amis was born in Oxford, England, in 1949. He is the author of fifteen novels, two collections of stories and eight works of non-fiction.

Sponsor: 'The Dartboard'³

Height: 5ft 6 inches

Weight: Unspecified; 'the weightless resisted weight'⁴.

David Foster Wallace (USA)



Wallace was born in Ithaca, New York, USA, in 1962. He is the author of three novels, three short-story collections and many works of non-fiction.

Sponsor: 'Euclid's Sphere'⁵

Height: 6ft 2 inches

Weight: 200 pounds ('on a good day'⁶)

³ Chapter 6, 'The Doors of Deception', *London Fields*

⁴ Part 1, *Lionel Asbo*.

⁵ Winter, BS 1963, *Infinite Jest*

⁶ p. xv, Lipsky

Commentators and match officials

Saul Leslie

Before taking up PhD research at the University of Liverpool on portrayals of disability and employment in post-1900 literature, Saul worked in higher education as a disability supervisor and disability rights campaigner. In 2022 his academic research helped to pass the British Sign Language Bill through the UK Parliament and into law. His writing has appeared in the Times Literary Supplement, and he works with Penguin Random House to assist disabled novelists with their writing. His own fiction has been published by Bloomsbury and Liverpool University Press. He teaches disability-creative writing at the University of Liverpool. He was the chair of the University of London's 'Infinite Reading Group', which focused on the 'baggy monsters' of contemporary literature. It was described by Birkbeck University's Martin Eve as a 'valuable public resource'. (sileslie@liverpool.ac.uk)

Elsa Canetti

Currently Elsa holds the record as the youngest ever Wimbledon Writers' Champion, beating Olga Tokarczuk in the 2021 final. She has written many books about her experiences as a trophy winner. Her non-fiction includes *Grass and Grit: How to Serve*, and *In Deep Schtitt*, a history of German tennis. Her essay *Vera's Tennis Partner*, about Mrs. Nabokov's role in her husband's literary career, won the prestigious Murray Mound Award. With support from the Googleheim Fund her first poetry collection, *Double Dates with Tracey Austin*, will be published in the new year.

Umpire Madame Emma Bovary

Based in Rouen, Northern France, Bovary was educated in a convent. She rejects as useless whatever does not minister to her heart's immediate fulfilment, '– being of a sentimental rather than an aesthetic temperament, in search of emotions, not of scenery'⁷.

Beci Carver

In 2017, Beci started a lectureship at the University of Exeter in twentieth-century literature. Her first book, *Granular Modernism*, was published in 2014 by Oxford University Press, and her sports writing includes 'Tennis as Literary Technique', published in *Textual Practice* (2022: Routledge).

⁷ p. 49, *Madame Bovary*, Gustave Flaubert, Penguin Popular Classics: 1995

Citations, facts, and statistics

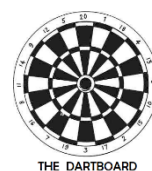
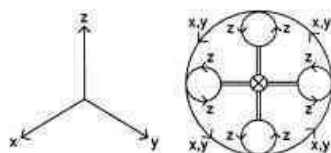
Below is a list of all of the quotations and citations referred to in the commentary.

1. Of all the writer-tennis players Wallace would like to hit against he'd like to play against Amis (p. 55, *Although Of Course You End Up Becoming Yourself*, David Lipsky, 2010: Broadway Books)
2. 'Everything is being thought of ahead' (David Foster Wallace Uncut Interview, 2003, URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iGLzWdT7vGc>)
3. Wallace's tennis game required him 'to think *n* shots ahead' (p. 9, 'Derivative Sport in Tornado Alley', *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again*, Wallace, 1997: Little, Brown)
4. Wallace used his 'preternatural gifts to compensate for not much physical talent' (p. 7, 'Tornado', *Supposedly*)
5. Wallace's maximalist sentences with their 'anxious quality' which 'don't conform very well to the breath' (San Francisco 2004 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mfjiSjocoAo>)
6. Joyce 'lacked was any interest in his opponent' ('Nabokov and Literary Greatness', Amis, https://martinamisweb.com/pre_2006/amis/amisnabokov.htm)
7. Wallace wanted Infinite Jest to have the subtitle, 'a failed entertainment' (p. 183, *Every Love Story is a Ghost Story*, DT Max, Granta: 2012)
8. Amis found that when you're older, 'the return comes over the net, and you think, "Oh, look, there's a ball coming over the net"...' ('Martin Amis on Feminism', *Women's Wear Daily*, Samantha Conti, May 2010, <https://wwd.com/eye/people/martin-amis-on-feminism-and-tennis-3063771/#>)
9. 'an arcadia splattered with mud and blood' ('Political Correctness: Robert Bly and Philip Larkin', Amis, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ePVUPOCQtBA>)
10. "the messes of an ordinary life—spills, slippages..." ('Introduction', *Granular Modernism*, Beci Carver, OUP: 2014)
11. Amis found out about the existence of Delilah, a daughter from a brief affair ('My long lost dad, Martin Amis: Interview with Delilah Jeary', *The Guardian*, Harriet Swain, February 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2011/feb/26/delilah-jeary-martin-amis-father>)
12. The main theme of Amis's books was all about lost children. 'Martin Amis Interview with Charlie Rose' 2000, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y3xV-6eRCFI>
13. "I don't have children but I imagine our children's generation" ([Rare] David Foster Wallace interview: By Chris Lydon Feb. 1996 - YouTube)
14. Wallace describes trying to anticipate the tennis serve of 'Joe Perfecthair' (p. 10, 'Tornado', *Supposedly*)

15. Wallace calls 'the average US lonely person Joe Briefcase' (p. 23, 'E Unibus Pluram', *Supposedly*)
16. '...Mr. Average, or even Mr. Above Average (whom we had better start calling Joe Laptop)...' (p. xi, 'Foreword', *The Quotable Hitchens*, Amis, Da Capo Press: 2011)
17. Wallace is writing on behalf of 'those of us civilians who know in our gut that writing is an act of communication...' (p. 138, 'Greatly Exaggerated', *Supposedly*)
18. Wallace positions himself 'outside the ghastly jargon of the academy' 'Reading the Ghost', *Orbit*, David Hering [Hering | Reading the Ghost in David Foster Wallace's Fiction | Orbit: A Journal of American Literature \(openlibhums.org\)](https://openlibhums.org/reading-the-ghost-in-david-foster-wallace-s-fiction-orbit-a-journal-of-american-literature)
19. Amis writes nearly exclusively about the working class – or the residuum, the unworking class ([Martin Amis on Newsnight \(June 13th 2012\) - YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=52kiS1oV2ko))
20. Desmond Pepperdine is described as the 'Renaissance Man', giving 'himself a course on calligraphy' while living in the squalor of Diston council estate (Part 1, *Lionel Asbo*, Amis, Vintage: 2013)
21. See note #10
22. 'it becomes necessary for us to watch the authors deceive us through spin' (p. 2, 'Tennis as Literary Technique', *Textual Practice*, Beci Carver, March 2022, <https://ore.exeter.ac.uk/repository/bitstream/handle/10871/129223/Tennis%20as%20literary%20technique.pdf?sequence=3>)
23. Amis is a writer 'fascinated with distortions and distempers' that doesn't 'sit around feeling disgusted' but rather sits around feeling entertained or even 'enthused' ([Martin Amis on his novel Money - YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=52kiS1oV2ko))
24. 'spin within spin' (p. 10, 'Tennis as Literary Technique', *Textual Practice*, Carver)
25. Wallace played his 'best in bad conditions' (p. 4, 'Tornado', *Supposedly*)
26. p. 201, 'Three Stabs at Tennis', *The Rub of Time*, Amis, Jonathan Cape: 2017
27. a composite of bearskin, sealskin, and cotton, 'stiffened with whalebone' with 'lozenges of velvet and rabbit-skin' (p. 16, *Madame Bovary*, Gustave Flaubert, Penguin Popular Classics: 1995)
28. One student asks another, 'have you read *Madame Bovary*?' and the other student replies, 'no not personally' (p. 31, *Although Of Course*, Lipsky)
29. 'I always sweated so much that I stayed fairly ventilated in all weathers' (p. 7, 'Tornado', *Supposedly*)
30. Sweat 'on their upper lips, on their brows, plump globules of sweat...' (p. 179, *The Pregnant Widow*, Amis, Jonathan Cape: 2010)
31. Wallace remarks that there are people 'who like to make words longer and more polysyllabic...' (p. 203, *Experience*, Amis, Vintage: 2001)
32. When people use 'prior' or 'subsequent to', they're messing up in a high-level grammatical way ('David Foster Wallace on Pretentious Language', <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=52kiS1oV2ko>)
33. In the Afterword to *Time's Arrow*, Amis gives thanks to his 'interlocutors', including Michael Pietsch (p. 176, *Time's Arrow*, Amis, Jonathan Cape: 1991)
34. During set point, Lifton served, he 'approached the net, and wrongfootingly dispatched my attempted pass' (p. ix, 'Foreword', *The Quotable Hitchens*)
35. Amis describes the semicolon as 'stately' (p. 395, *Inside Story*, Amis)

36. Amis has talked about 'the haughty semi-colon' used by John Updike ('The Rub of Time interview', 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7sXUOTm_qcw)
37. Wallace describes how he only lets a student of his use a semicolon if it is 'Mozartesque' ('David Foster Wallace on Ambition', <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w5R8gduPZw4>)
38. Kafka has commandeered the letter 'K' ('America, "Amerika"', *The New York Times*, Adam Kirch, [America, 'Amerika' - The New York Times \(nytimes.com\)](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/15/us/culture/david-foster-wallace-on-ambition.html))
39. The footnote helps to preserve collateral thoughts and to give the reader 'a clear view of the geography of a writer's mind...' (p. 7, *Experience*)
40. Amis points out that each word of Robert Conquests' *The Harvest of Sorrow* represents the deaths of 20 people during the famine. That book is 404 pages long ('The Novelist as Truthteller', Amis interview, [The Novelist as Truthteller: The Achievement and Legacy of Vasily Grossman - YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w5R8gduPZw4))
41. 'I've said 2,752 words right now since I started. Meaning 2,752 words as of just before I said, "I've said," versus 2,754 if you count "I've said" — which I do, still' (p. 163, *The Pale King*, Wallace, Little, Brown: 2011)
42. 'Little did they know that the place they were about to burgle – the shop, and the flat above it – had already been burgled...' (Chapter 13, 'Little Did They Know', *London Fields*, Amis, Jonathan Cape: 1989)
43. The only Amis book which is listed in Wallace's own personal collection was Amis's 1978 novel *Success* (David Foster Wallace's Personal Library, [David Foster Wallace's Personal Library - Complete List \(veritrope.com\)](https://www.veritrope.com/david-foster-wallace-personal-library))
44. 'One reason why the home of someone whose home has been burglarized feels violated and unclean is that...' (p. 57, *Infinite Jest*, Wallace, Little Brown: 1996)
45. Zadie Smith said that in a list of favourite writers Wallace gave her, Larkin was the only poet (n. 6, 'Brief Interviews with Hideous Men: The Difficult Gifts of David Foster Wallace', *Changing My Mind*, Zadie Smith, Penguin: 2009)
46. 'Rain as an element and an ambiance provides a backdrop to Larkin's life...' ([Political Correctness: Robert Bly and Philip Larkin - YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w5R8gduPZw4))
47. 'And it was nearly done, this frail travelling coincidence...'

(p. 94, 'The Whitsun Weddings', *Collected Poems*, Philip Larkin, Faber and Faber: 2003)



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