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Tennis as literary technique

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ABSTRACT
How might a novel play tennis? In a New York Times essay on Roger Federer, David Foster Wallace reflects on how the climactic topspin lob that won Wimbledon for Federer in 2006 was a product of narrative, reliant on a sequence of bluffs, building up to a final unreturnable shot whose genius lay in its 'unimaginable angle.' Tennis becomes fiction here, both in the sense that the final shot is unreal and that it is Rafael Nadal's imagination that is ultimately overwhelmed by Federer's spin. In this essay I consider how Wallace and Vladimir Nabokov's most tennis-obsessed novels, Infinite Jest and Lolita, achieve the equivalent of tennis's 'unimaginable angles' in their language and form.

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Dedicated to Penny Carver

Imagine yourself on a tennis court standing across from a formidable opponent. They lift their racket to serve, you are ready to respond, and suddenly a capricious gust of wind sweeps through the court. Your opponent is somehow attuned to the wind's caprice and not only manages to serve but to introduce their own spin to the ball's whirl, a spin within a spin, so that when the ball comes to you its arc is doubly difficult to predict. You leap in the wrong direction, beaten. Fifteen Love. This single misfortune acquires the momentum of a pattern. The mad wind persists, your opponent's spin remains invincible, you leap in vain. There is no possibility of a draw in tennis,[1] and the potential for infinite play contained within the sport's convoluted medieval scoring system is brought home to you by the way this set rolls on and on, as if in defiance of all time but its own. Just enough balls are fed to you without spin to keep you engaged and in the game. You arrive at deuce together. The tension mounts as two consecutive wins are needed to

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win the set, but your opponent takes care never to deliver two returnable balls in a row. The set ends only when they are ready to win; likewise the match. Having entered the court feeling like a co-competitor, you leave it feeling like a witness to someone else's performance.

In this essay, I will read the metatextual relationship between tennis 'spin' and storytelling in Vladimir Nabokov's Lolita and David Foster Wallace's Infinite Jest as an invitation to interpret their style and method as tennis techniques. When Nabokov writes of Lolita that her tennis shots are 'frank',[2] and when Wallace lets his tennis word 'spin' evolve into a metaphor for the way his fictional characters lie to each other[3] – a spin within a spin – I understand them to gesture to a larger sense in which their writing *is* tennis. Arguably, this equation may be applied to all storytelling, as well as broadened to apply to any sport in which balls are angled cunningly. We have been calling storytelling 'spinning' since the fifteenth century,[4] and the evolution of the word 'spin' to suggest a ball's twirling movement through the air is not exclusive to tennis. Indeed, it began in cricket. Amol Rajan's fascinating book, *Twirlymen: The Unlikely History of Cricket's Greatest Spin Bowlers*, recounts how cricket's nineteenth-century spin virtuosos persuaded their critics that they were not cheating: that spin was compatible with sportsmanship. However, in my reading of them, Nabokov and Wallace push further the connection between their own yarn-spinning and tennis by giving tennis thematic and narrative prominence in their novels, and by exposing the reader to a performance like the one described in my first paragraph, in which it becomes necessary for us to watch the authors deceive us through spin – or through tonal slipperiness, ambiguity, digressions that go nowhere, invented names that flicker into symbols, plotlines that fall apart, memories that may not be trustworthy, and addresses to the reader that flutter with winks like butterfly swarms. We do not know where we are with these writers, which is not to say that they are not fun to read, but that their fun is achieved at the cost of our comfort. If the space of reading may be thought of as our half of the court, that space may seem not to belong to us any more, so overrun is it by contrary balls.

Two main historical developments precipitated Wallace and Nabokov's reinvention of the novel in 1955 and 1996 respectively as a medium of oppressive play. The most impactful was the immense expansion of the reading public over the course of the twentieth century, reflected in the jump in American fiction titles from just 175 in the 1870s to over 1000 in the 1950s, to over 6000 by the 1990s.[5] Having once addressed readerships that would comfortably fit into a large meeting room, novelists of the period found themselves addressing crowds that no auditorium could hold. They had become showmen, and in this capacity they devised a type of literary utterance for which there were no precedents. It is hard to imagine any of the modernist writers whom Nabokov and Wallace

admired performing to an audience of thousands. The other development that prompted their writing's figurative mutation into tennis was the evolution of the sport itself, from a pastime for the rich, who, in the privacy of their private courts were content to be amateurs, into a field of fierce international endeavour, available to be played in an array of impressively large public courts across the world. In 1927, tennis began to be broadcast on the radio, and from 1937, it was regularly televised. Encouraged by these various forms of popularity, its aesthetics spread from the courts into the public imagination, leaving behind green rectangles, white costumes, criss-crossed rackets, nets, and bright balls (incandesced to yellow for television in 1972), on the retinas of viewers.

Tennis also gave rise to a new vocabulary, ripe for punning and other play. Among the coinages of the era was 'spin', another word for 'twist', whose technique Nabokov believed to have been devised by the *fin-de-siècle* Belgian tennis Champion, Paul de Borman: 'He was left-handed, and one of the first Europeans to use a slice (or twist) service.'[6] Nabokov betrays no obvious sign of amusement at the fun coincidence whereby tennis's first storyteller had a name that sounds like 'bore', though it must have influenced his choice of originator (there were plenty of other devious players to pick from). By the turn of the twenty-first century, when Wallace was writing euphorically about modern tennis technique, spin's deceptive range had been significantly stretched, partly in response to the curiosity of millions of eyes, partly because, by then, tennis rackets had been adapted to exploit the smallest nuances of grip and nudge, and partly because the best tennis players had become artists. Wallace at least held that Roger Federer challenged his watchers to imagine what they could not see; he writes of the second set of the Wimbledon final of 2006, in which Federer played Rafael Nadal:

> Roger Federer steps to [the] ball and now hits a totally different crosscourt backhand, this one much shorter and sharper-angled, an angle no one would anticipate, and so heavy and blurred with topspin that it lands shallow and just inside the sideline and takes off hard after the bounce, and Nadal can't move in to cut it off and can't get to it laterally along the baseline, because of all the angle and topspin – end of point […] Everything […] was designed by the Swiss to maneuver Nadal and lull him and disrupt his rhythm and balance and open up that last, unimaginable angle.[7]

In this essay, I will use the analogy between tennis and writing that Wallace and Nabokov draw to reflect on the 'unimaginable angles' of their fiction.

Both *Lolita* and *Infinite Jest* have a long history of frustrating readers who, in principle, are good sports, willing to put up with more than the usual quantities of trickery and boredom. David Peck wailed in the *London Review of Books* when *Infinite Jest* first appeared in 1996: 'I resent the five weeks of my life I gave over to it',[8] and his rage has since consolidated

into a normal response to the tome, which, combined with its addendum of open-ended endnotes, spans over a thousand pages (in my Abacus edition) – more if you read the open-endedness as a way of implying infinity plus one. Even Wallace's fans have their limits, like David Eggers, who writes in the foreword to the 2006 edition of the novel: 'There were times, reading a very exhaustive account of a tennis match, say, when I thought, well, okay. I like tennis as much as the next guy, but enough already.'[9] Likewise Nabokov's readers have been inclined either to denounce *Lolita*'s 'atrophy of moral sense',[10] as Kingsley Amis does in a prominent review of 1959, or to praise it cautiously, knowing themselves to be on dangerous ground. *Lolita* was among the reasons that Edward Wilson and Nabokov fell out, bringing to an end a twenty-year-old intellectual intimacy.[11] Both these novels were encircled on their publication by what Peck calls 'hype'[12] and what Amis more colourfully calls 'inevitable big-review-plus-leader-plus-interminable correspondence in the *Times Literary Supplement*',[13] on the basis of a notoriety that long preceded their arrival in print. It would of course be an exaggeration to say that the books were awaited with the eagerness that hushes Wimbledon's spectators, but in subtler ways, literary history produced its own version of a spellbound crowd. Readers, when flipping open their copies, were expecting an encounter with an idiosyncratic mind; they knew that they would be challenged, that their fun would be hard bought. Roland Barthes's essay of 1967 'The Death of the Author' was a decade in the distance when *Lolita* received her debut and old news by the time *Infinite Jest* had the opportunity to irritate Peck,[14] but 'the author' as a concept was alive and well when these novels were published. Readers were then either annoyed or charmed – depending on their patience – to find themselves in the company of a self-conscious adversary, warmed up and ready to play.

That Nabokov and Wallace set out to provoke their readers is clear. In an interview, Wallace once characterised himself as feeling 'hostile' towards readers of *Infinite Jest*, and when asked to explain himself, replied that his sentences were intended, without being ungrammatical, to be 'a real bitch to read', and that the novel 'bludgeoned the reader with data', and 'devot [ed] a lot of energy to creating expectations and then [...] disappointing them.'[15] Among the book's main plot strands is the story of a search for the mastercopy of 'Infinite Jest', a film that, infamously, excites viewers to the point of stopping their hearts, and in doing so recalls the sensation Hal feels on the tennis court when 'everything has too many aspects',[16] 'too many frames per second.'[17] Like the film from which his novel notionally receives its title, Wallace aims to overwhelm rather than gratify us – just as Federer aimed to overwhelm Nadal. Nabokov, in his turn, depicts himself in his afterword of 1956 as having intended to shock contemporary readers with one of the 'three themes which are utterly taboo'[18] – paedophilia – the other two being interracial marriage and the happiness of atheists (which

could be the subject of *Ada or Ardor*). Commenting on the unpublished manuscript in 1954 in an attempt to explain its rejection by Simon & Schuster & Viking Press, Wilson complained that the novel was 'too absurd to be horrible or tragic, yet too unpleasant to be funny',[19] putting the disharmony down to Nabokov's ineptitude. Yet this effect was a deliberate one: a spin or twist that Nabokov had engineered with the object of creating an 'unimaginable angle.'

It has become customary to read Nabokov's novels as games, especially since the publication of his *Lectures on Literature* in 1980, in which his own predisposition to read other authors as game strategists is put to such brilliant use. In reading Austen's plot twist in *Mansfield Park* as a knight-like 'sudden swerve', Nabokov may even be understood to describe the chess equivalent of spin.[20] I am not the first critic to read the series of lushly imagined tennis matches at *Lolita's* centre as an inscription of Nabokov's larger interest in games, or the first to dissect the language of these scenes. It was Thomas Karshan in 2011 who initially proposed that *Lolita* hinged on the tennis matches between Lolita and Humbert,[21] Ronald Bush having, in 2009, devoted an essay to the function of tennis in the novel.[22] In Nabokov's lifetime, too – though much to his irritation – William Rowe noticed the erotic dimension of the 'rallying' and 'climaxes' in Nabokov's tennis commentary.[23] But unlike my predecessors, I will focus specifically in this essay on the use of tennis-reminiscent writing to disorient our reading, so that, somehow, standing across from a portly, middle-aged Nabokov ('I am fairly fat [but] play tennis better than I did in my youth'),[24] we find ourselves unable to return the ball.

It is my proposition that, in reading *Lolita*, we do not take part in an equal game but enter a liminal status between co-competitor and viewer, since it is only Nabokov who may spin the ball. In our relative helplessness, we resemble Lolita. Writing of his mentee's tennis, Humbert notes: 'It had, that serve of hers, beauty, directness, youth, a classical purity of trajectory, and was, despite its spanking pace, fairly easy to return, having as it did no twist or sting to the long elegant hop.'[25] Ballerina of the court as she is, there is no spin to Lolita's serve, and the same absence is conspicuous everywhere in her game. Humbert notes: 'There was nothing wrong or deceitful in the spirit of the game'[26] – meaning, ironically, that her game is flawed by a kind of perfection – and that 'She […] revealed an innocence, a frankness, a kindness of ball-placing, that permitted a second-rate but determined player […] to poke and cut his way to victory.'[27] Brian Boyd argues that Humbert dashes Lolita's chances as a Wimbledon champion by reducing her to an erotic object;[28] yet Lolita's disadvantage arises not from how she sees herself but from who she is. She is not a storyteller, but someone to whom stories are told; nor are we readers storytellers. Her tennis improves, and her control over her fate grows, only when she learns to disentangle

herself from Humbert's spun web of words by claiming the spaces they share as her own – her half of the tennis court, her bedroom, her road trip (when she leaves him).

How may we protect ourselves against being lied to when we read? This question is foundational to the experience of reading fiction, and the answer is normally that we contract ourselves to withholding our disbelief, if the illusion is robust enough to deserve it. Belief is notional and is our decision to make or unmake. We control our dream. However, in Nabokov and Wallace, this contractual relationship is complicated by variations of spin that make it impossible to know quite what we are meant (notionally) to believe and how we should conduct ourselves towards it.

Writing of the students at the Enfield Tennis Academy, the fictional tennis school where the narrative of *Infinite Jest* twistingly unfolds, Wallace tells us that 'E. T. A' kids are conditioned to watch not just the ball but the ball's rotating seams, to read the spin coming in.'[29] One way of reading his novel and Nabokov's might be to apply this lesson to our reading, attending to the 'seams' of a sentence's winding syntax and rogue puns or to the way irony toys with our expectations in an endeavour to ready ourselves for their trickery. Wallace's protagonist Hal could be our model in this approach since he has already adapted his tennis training to detect literal liars. The following explanation is offered by way of confession to his brother Mario (although the subsequent discovery that he has been lying to Mario may prompt us to doubt his words):

> 'Some people, from what I've seen […], when they lie, they become very still and centered and their gaze very concentrated and intense. They try to dominate the person they lie to. The person to whom they're lying. Another type becomes fluttery and insubstantial and punctuates his lie with little self-deprecating motions and sounds, as if credulity were the same as pity. Some bury the lie in […] digressions and asides […] Then there are what I might call your Khamakaze-style liars. These'll tell you a surreal and fundamentally incredible lie, and then offer you the lie they really want you to buy instead […] Or then the type who sort of over-elaborates on the lie [..] So now I've established a sub-type of the over-elaborator type. This is the liar who used to be an over-elaborator but has somehow snapped to the fact that rococo elaborations give him away every time, so he changes and now lies tersely, sparely, seeming somehow bored[30]

That Wallace is writing about his own tics and tactics here is obvious, as is the winking association between Hal and ourselves as spin analysts; the passage thus smilingly offers itself as counsel for the reader. On the other hand, this gift is booby-trapped in a way that exemplifies our predicament throughout the novel, in standing across from an endlessly jesting Wallace. The sheer transparency of the metafictional subtext detracts from its credibility, since Wallace is never normally this frank with us, while if

we do not take the transparency at its word, it is hard to know what to do with it. Could the passage really constitute a departure from the norm of spin to a Lolita-like 'frank' 'ball-placing'? The answer is probably no, but if it is more spin, we are led to wonder how we may categorise it – or see it coming and return the ball (i.e. interpret its tone and implication accurately)? Unlike Hal, we are not trained to differentiate between types of spin, and moreover, if we attempt to identify the spin type, we risk taking the passage's advice after all, having begun by doubting its veracity. The ball whistles past us, its seams a blur, hitting the court completely out of reach. Point to Wallace.

Spun balls are half invisible, fluorescent yellow secrets concealing their trajectory until they hit the court. Balls have not always been yellow,[31] and spin belongs to the twentieth-century, making the possibility of a link between oblique fiction-writing and tennis a modern one. But the association between tennis and adversarial deception is ancient. The Roman precursor to tennis and football, *harpastum*, relies on the cunning of teams of competitors in shunting a small ball across a white line manned by the other team.[32] *Harpastum*'s evolution into football preserves the social and collaborative element of the Romans' rivalry, while tennis splits the aggressive impulse between two individuals (in a singles game) with private territory to man, bonded in an intimate yet hostile way by their constant surveillance of each other. The Greeks appear to have been too solitary by nature even for this narrower model of sporting intimacy. Their closest equivalent to tennis, a game whose only remaining trace is a silhouette on a 500–400 BCE lekythos of two men on piggyback passing a ball to each other, never took off. Stephen G. Miller writes that 'To make playing with a ball fun, you generally need at least one other person. But *arete*' – or 'virtue' in the eyes of the Greeks – 'is an individual characteristic, and it is a function of self-fulfilment, of testing oneself against individual capacities and limits.'[33] It takes two to tell a lie, and the Greeks preferred to be alone. More willing to mix, the European medieval proto-tennis players were knights, positioned in the forecourt of castles and armed for a lighter (yet still brutal) version of their usual combat. In the Renaissance period, the sociality of the medieval sport became more openly aggressive, as the more modern game that spread from the Mediterranean to England began to absorb the rhetoric of war and the spirit of international military rivalry. Shakespeare's Prince Hal, on whom Wallace's Hal is based,[34] acknowledges a gift of tennis balls from the French heir apparent with the threat: 'When we have matched our raquets to these balls,/We will, in France, by God's grace, play a set/Shall strike his father's crown into the hazard.[35] The pun on 'hazard' here links the scoring area of a tennis court with the endangerment of the French crown, while the crown itself becomes the ball, slung into the Dedans or Grill or Winning-Gallery by Hal.

Comparing Tolstoy to a tennis player in one of his Russian lectures, Nabokov distinguishes the brutality of early tennis from the game renamed 'lawn tennis' by the English in the 1870s, noting that the 'court-tennis […] mentioned by Shakespeare and Cervantes' was played by 'kings […], stamping and panting in resounding halls.'[36] In Nabokov's snapshot of history, the echoey acoustics of the halls in which tennis matches used to be held, combined with the dead weight of the stuffed balls, makes the early players look like thugs, whereas, at Cambridge in the early 1920s, where he first began to throw himself into tennis, the modern manifestation of the sport seemed relatively gentle. The student magazine at Trinity College grins as if in memory of a primitive era when recording that Nabokov's peer W. W. Hill-Wood 'could have made a fortune in Tudor times by selling his hair to stuff tennis balls.'[37] But what Nabokov did not know, arriving as he did when tennis was all the rage and after Cambridge graduates and Wimbledon champions Reggie Doherty, Laurence Doherty and Anthony Wilding had earned the university a reputation for spawning tennis brilliance, is that the soft, amateur form of the nineteenth-century sport inherited from private courts in country estates and Cannes had recently been replaced by something much more ferocious. In the 1880s, when Wilding arrived at Trinity, he was shocked to hear tennis dismissed as 'pat-ball',[38] and his own pirouette to stardom in the 1910s, clinched by a quartet of Wimbledon wins, became one of the accelerants for a change of attitude. Nabokov's cohort were the beneficiaries of this change, among the evidence for which was a monthly column on 'Lawn Tennis' in the student magazine and the gradual whitening of the courts as students bought themselves purpose-made tennis clothes.[39] In the magazine column, Trinity's version of modern tennis reveals itself to have been just as reliant on aggressive deception as its Shakespearean forerunner, while decades of technical experimentation had, by then, introduced alongside the Renaissance's thundering lob a menu of insidious spins. An anonymous reporter notes of the Trinity player, E. C. Francis: 'he has a dog-like devotion to seemingly impossible balls [and] two serves, both nasty, a drive 'mit kick', and a vast fund of low cunning.'[40] A 'kick' is surely a twist or spin.

It was Trinity's Wilding who coined the word 'topspin' in 1912, slightly in advance of its earliest citation in the *OED*,[41] and providing the verbal equipment for Wallace almost a century later to conclude his ecstatic commentary on Federer with the verdict: 'impossible without topspin.'[42] In his book *On the Court and Off*, Wilding lists topspin and backspin as methods of deceit, explaining that 'Top is imparted to the ball by drawing the racket over with a kind of rolling motion.'[43] In the *OED*'s first citing, this motion is understood to give an 'awkward' trajectory to the shot,[44] which, in the case of a spun ball whose scope for movement is enlarged by its upward orientation, may extend the duration of one's opponent's fluster. Wallace would add a century later

that an extra element of topspin's daring lies in its intercepting another act of flight: 'you're not putting a static object into motion here but rather reversing the flight and (to a varying extent) spin of a projectile coming towards you.'[45] A topspin is a sudden wild arc whose genesis is a split-second decision by a mind trained to compose riddles in the air. Wallace argues that it was only after the narrow wooden rackets of Nabokov's time were replaced by the roomier metal ones of the 1970s that topspin could be fully exploited as a method of deception;[46] and this idea of a technologically armed graduation towards more complex experiments in spin may be aligned with the history of the postmodern novel. In the 1950s, novels had yet to develop their full toolkit for deception. *Lolita* would be followed in 1962 by *Pale Fire*, the novel in which Nabokov reinvents the scholarly endnote as a site of confession. Echoing Nabokov's oxymoronic title in *The Pale King*, Wallace also adopted the Russian's pseudo-scholarly method of textual supplementation, but exchanged the endnote for a footnote that let him contradict himself more quickly and visibly. In *Infinite Jest*, he took Nabokov's endnote, a good but narrow racket that allowed him limited 'twist', and swapped it for an endnote at the back or baseline of his giant novel, constructing a 'vista too large for the eye to contain.'[47] The equivalent of Hal's 'widebody' Dunlop racket with its tensed gut strings and thickish neck that Hal casually strangles as he waits to play, is a 1990s novel adapted from Nabokov's corpus that utterly outmanoeuvres the reader with endnotes like topspin lobs.

Wallace and Nabokov, in their double status as novelists and tennis players, differ from the characters whose tennis they minutely describe in the degree to which the decision to play is theirs. Both authors chose to play tennis as adults in their free time, and both, at least according to my reading of them, turned their writing into tennis when they were off the court. Their appetite for the sport was of such an intensity that it spilt beyond the baseline, just as their appetite for fiction-writing poured into their notion of spin. On the other hand, Lolita, Hal and the students at the Enfield Tennis Academy, though they express an initial interest of their own in tennis, are afterwards locked into a programme of study they cannot control. They are in a sense a captive audience to their own tennis playing, a predicament that compares to that of the reader of *Lolita* or *Infinite Jest* who is neither fully participant in making the text mean nor simply a passive witness to its performances. Frank Kermode likens 'the novel-reader' to 'an infant', in that reading novels requires 'a pattern of expectation improper to maturity',[48] and Nabokov and Wallace in their turn show the novel-reader to be child-like in her captive willpower. We play or read on the authors' terms, on a court they choose, in weather conditions they know. With a mixture of mischief and apprehension, both authors connect our enforced play with the situation of the paedophilic victim. Lolita's tennis training is clearly a metaphor for her initiation into

adult–child sex, while Hal's rival at the academy, John Wain, is sleeping with his mother, subjecting Wallace's hero to an oedipal relationship by proxy. Wain's compliance in this affair is taken for granted, while at the same time the principle of taking any complicity for granted is undermined by the satirised statistic: '[the academy] maintains the gentle fiction that 100% of all students are enrolled of their own ambitious volition.'[49]

Nabokov and Wallace were shrewd enough to know that innocence was a faulty concept, especially when applied to teens – and their reader doubles – and that Lolita and Hal would have learnt to detect, play along with, and practice deceit without tennis's help. But they are also interested in the tension between their characters' hunger for honesty and the instinct to misdirect that makes spin possible. Lolita's 'candour' on the tennis court implicitly thinks its way back to a lost innocence, while her lies about her whereabouts and motives are her way of growing up too fast. It is striking that her greatest grievance against Humbert should be his lie about her mother's drowning: 'She said she was sure I had murdered her mother.'[50] This exception to her norm of sullen non-interference may suggest that Humbert is most offensive to her when his fictions are gentle – when, in a way, he is most protective – since on these occasions he not only acts on the obviously wrongful power that stems from abuse but on a fatherly authority to which he has a right and may simperingly defend. More spin within spin! Hal's hunger for the unspun takes the form of a fascination with Mario's ability to trust everything he hears. Watching his non-tennis-playing brother listen and absorb stories, Hal hypothesises a supernatural form of tennis:

> Maybe […] whatever's said to you is so completely believed by you that […] it becomes sort of true in transit. Flies through the air toward you and reverses its spin and hits you true, however mendaciously it comes off the other person's stick[51]

As if he were Lolita's superhero double, Mario produces a 'candour' in spinning balls that neutralises their mischief, so that rather than losing game after game (hypothetically speaking, since he cannot really play) he wins every set. His 'reversals' work by a similar principle to topspin, in that they intercept the flight of an airborne ball, while, at the same time, they are performed when the balls are on their way to him, so that he reaches them before having to cross the court towards them, or in other words they reach him and he alters their course before he has been able to reach them. It is as if there were two of him, one stationary and the other a virtual, leaping intercessor – like Nintendo's Mario of the *Super Mario Bros*, bounding in the air with his knee lifted.

What would it be like to read novels the way Mario hypothetically plays tennis? In a sense, this is Adam Kelly's question in the essay of 2010 in

which he coins the now familiar phrase 'the New Sincerity' to describe how Wallace reconciles his postmodern ironic manner with his desire to communicate 'passion, conviction, and deep moral issues.'[52] Kelly's argument is that Wallace invites us to find sincerity in his words in spite of their spin, teaching us in the process that 'the guarantee of the writer's serious intentions cannot finally lie in representation.'[53] Importing this theory back into the scenario with which I begin this essay, we may perhaps imagine a Mario-like version of ourselves seeing a ball approach us, not seeing its seams, but watching ourselves split into two in order to intercept it and reverse the spin. Watching the ball achieve 'truth in transit', we may see beyond its spinning surface to, say, a sincere critique of late-capitalist technocracy – as Paul Giles does[54] – or of self-preoccupation – as Elizabeth Freudenthal does.[55] The text will then transform before our eyes into an earnest political or ethical treatise. However, on the level of plot, Wallace repeatedly warns us that to see truth in place of lies requires a naivety that is dangerous. 'Representation' *should* really be our main reference point in deciding whether to trust an utterance. Mario's epistemological stunts are risky in keeping him in the dark about Hal's drug addiction, their mother's affair with Wain, and the nature of the film 'Infinite Jest' that their recently deceased father directed. The necessity of seeing spin for what it is in a book that interlocks its thematisation of tennis with guilty secrets of paedophilic predation and addiction is an urgent one.

There could be no more grotesque author proxy than the paedophilic character in *Infinite Jest* who sneaks into his son Matty Pemulis's bedroom at night, dodging toy cars and trucks on his way to the bed, seats himself as if ready to tell a bedtime story, rebukes the completely silent Matty for accusing him of having 'nought on his mind but a fook',[56] and then 'fooks' him. The disagreement between speech and action during these visits is recognised over time by Matty as a form of sexual stimulation, the spin acting as a precursor to his father's arousal: 'Matty'd shrink away: shy are we sone scared are we? Matty'd shrink away even when he knew the shrinking fear was part of what brought it on.'[57] Matty's recoil seems to announce itself as a way of noticing the spin in his father's account of his motives (namely paternal love), to which his father seems to respond by becoming aroused, suggesting a relationship between Matty's knowing recoil and his father's erection. Matty wonders whether he will escape his father's attentions by pretending to find sincerity in his lies – discovering the 'truth in transit', as it were – and yet this too leads back to the grim inevitability of his assault. Matty even attempts his own version of spin, pretending to sleep while his father 'fooks' him, but again to no avail: 'his teeth clacked together in a mouth that wore the slight smile Matty'd decided truly sleeping people's faces wore.'[58] The word 'truly' here smuggles irony into its pun, by simultaneously referring to Matty's pretence of genuine sleep and calling to

mind a mismatch between 'true' in the sense of 'straight' or 'even' – used when throwing a ball or flattening a sports ground to ensure fair play[59] – and the constitutive bent line of a smile. To seem to sleep truly is to abandon straightness. There is no route back to truth from where Matty is.

Matty does not play tennis, but his younger brother Mike is one of the Enfield Tennis Academy's most promising players, and Hal's best friend, and Wallace leaves open the possibility that it is Mike's consciousness we enter during the rape scene, by dotting the passage with tennis terms and letting us know that the brothers share a bedroom. 'Truly' is one of these tells,[60] 'angle' another,[61] used when their father's giant body sinks into the bed's edge – which only Mike can see properly – and 'moon' is another, introduced in the image of the man's moonlit silhouette and referring in tennis to 'moonballs' or lobs that crash to the ground with unexpected suddenness.[62] The repeated phrase 'over the line',[63] supplemented later on by 'all the rules of mood were suspended',[64] is another. Mike's latent commentary shows how the scene may be experienced as an alternative form of tennis. Wallace writes in a footnote to his Federer essay that 'fragile psyches are rare in tennis',[65] and Pemulis senior may resemble a tennis virtuoso in his unflappability. Nothing that Matty does can break his father's resolve because his gentleness is pure spin. Wallace writes in a footnote to an essay on the U. S. Open that 'emotional flexibility is almost impossible for a jr.,'[66] and that, as a junior player himself, he would often end a day of tennis in which the competition had demanded his permanent attention, 'looking utterly wrung-out emotionally.'[67] Neither Mike nor Matty is capable of surviving the barrage of stress that accompanies Matty's rape; but Mike is at least able to lay claim to the scene analytically, by transferring a form of literacy borrowed from tennis into a new geometric environment.

No single individual owns the tennis courts on which Mike, Hal, Lolita and Humbert play, and it has always been the case in tennis that the terrain of the court resembled a battleground in presenting itself as a territory to be claimed. The court's two halves belong in a notional sense to the players who occupy them, but the ball's freedom to glide between the two continually unsettles assumptions of dominion. The tennis-derived American idiom 'the ball's in your court', coined in the late 1900s,[68] is premised on the way the activity of the ball generates forms of ownership that require constant rearticulation, as if possession were an act rather than a status. The best players 'play the whole court',[69] an idiom reminiscent of basketball's 'full court press',[70] suggesting an ability to control every corner of the space regardless of where one is standing. Tennis differs from *harpastum*'s other modern ancestor, football, in creating a contradiction between the effort to dominate the other half of the court and the confinement of players to their half. Invasion becomes a mental act, symbolised by the bombfall of balls, and experienced alone. Tellingly, in basketball's 'full

court press', the effect signified by 'press' is a product of collaboration, resulting in a dispersed force: an exertion of pressure by one whole team onto another whole team. Attack in basketball, as in football, is collective in execution and outcome, while the equivalent in tennis, even in doubles, is an intimate mind game. In basketball, we could say that the word 'court' remembers the medieval double use of the word to mean both a place and a community,[71] while in tennis it refers exclusively to the long rectangular site – the mere territory – whose emptiness became a theme of Piet Mondrian's paintings in the modernist period.[72] Tennis may seem to have more in common with chess than its sister ball games, dependent as it is on a symbolic advance through a space made eidetic by its geometry, and on the ambition of mental domination. In *Infinite Jest*, Mike distinguishes himself from other players through his mastery of the topspin lob, a shot Wallace connects with long-distance territorial war by likening it to 'the paraboloid transcontinental flight of a liquid-fuel strategic delivery vehicle.'[73] Mike's best shots are so precisely aimed and powerfully launched as to be capable of 'nailing a coin on the baseline.'[74] Thus, although helpless to do anything but watch in the room he shares with Matty, Mike's fine-tuned knowledge of the lines and angles of the court and of their changing relation to his lobs' mathematics, place him where he cannot be in person, making him lethal.

Mike's exposure to an especially vile form of storytelling turns him into a war weapon on the tennis court, making him again exploitable by elders who find in the techniques of the academy's players models of American imperialism. However, there is also an additional sense in which his topspin lob functions as a meaningful recuperative act, allowing him to recapture lost power. In the sense that spatial domination helps him, he resembles Lolita, who, although there is no devilry in her stroke, '*covers* the one thousand and fifty-square feet of her half of the court with wonderful ease [my italics].'[75] Lolita loses her bedroom when she embarks on her road trip with Humbert in the second half of the novel, and the court afterwards becomes the only space she can 'fill' with just herself. By finding a half-rhyme between her age – thirteen-point-five at the time of the match – and the dimensions of the rectangle, Humbert uses her little conquest to embellish his love poem about her, but her apricot body's reach across the space colour-codes it as part of herself. Two thousand miles away from Moscow in the early 1920s at Cambridge, Nabokov likewise carved out space for himself on Trinity's new and luxurious clay courts, where he spent more time with his brother Sergey than ever before.[76]

Feeling as though one may lay claim to a court's space (albeit provisionally and playfully) involves not just a familiarity with its tangible lines and limits but with the endlessly transforming geometries of a ball's movement through the air and with the way a court's surface informs the nature of a game. On

clay courts, balls bounce at a right angle, low and slowly – hence the term 'slow court' – so that spin comes to assume a crucial role in shaping the ball's flight. On grass and asphalt courts, or 'fast courts', balls bounce obliquely, high and fast, opening the window for new possibilities of spin. Humbert's 'rather heavily cut' serve is a product of Nabokov's hours on Trinity's clay courts,[77] where the difficulty of returning low-bouncing balls laid pressure on his serve. To the extent that he is Nabokov's proxy, Humbert would perhaps prefer to win every game on the first shot, but when playing Lolita, he finds himself cornered into topspins and backspins by her 'inordinately prehensile' stretch across the court.[78] Lolita would keep them rallying forever unless he intervened with 'low cunning', and he is not as fit as she is.

Hal's 'delicate and spinny, rather cerebral game' is calibrated to suit the asphalt courts at his school,[79] while Wallace's own game – on which Hal's is based – was attuned to asphalt and grass, as well as to the mercurial winds of his hometown of Philo in Central Illinois. Wallace explains in an essay on playing tennis in 'Tornado Alley':

> Because the expansion of response-possibilities is quadratic, you are required to think *n* shots ahead, where *n* is a hyperbolic function limited by the sinh of your opponent's talent and the cosh of the number of shots in the rally so far (roughly). I was good at this. What made me for a while near-great was that I could also admit the differential complication of wind into my calculations; I could think and play octally. For the wind put curves in the lines and transformed the game into 3-space.[80]

The ability to jump from the quadratic to the octal releases a parade of abstract shapes into Wallace's head that would be invisible to players who were not prompted by Philo's mad weather, combined with a gift for arithmetic, to mathematise their tennis. And the effect of Wallace's Mondrianian imaginings when playing junior tennis was not just to improve his game but to make both the the physical and hypothetical landscapes of the courts a home to him. Wallace's automatic maths acted as a kind of portable kinaesthetic entitlement to the land, so that, when playing away from home he felt doubly displaced: 'Playing on a perfect court was for me like treading water out of sight of land: I never knew where I was out there.'[81]

The idea of the tennis court as space in relation to which players may express competing territorial claims maps onto the experience of reading itself, where author and reader also share prior knowledge. Turning to the first page of *Lolita* or *Infinite Jest* is unlike 'treading water out of sight of land', since we 'know where we are' – that we are reading English or American English and that the text belongs to the novel genre – and this knowledge licenses us to relate to the space as though it were partially our own. On the other hand, these novels' language and form are redefined while we look

at them in ways that dismantle our knowledge. Our half of the court, our familiar reading terrain, shifts in and out of our possession as our reactions to the novels' stories lose their footing. Writing about tennis in his *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein reflects on how the physical tennis court is accompanied by an 'unbounded' abstract area of possibility where the game's rules stop.[82] There is no limitation in tennis to 'how hard' or 'how high' one may hit the ball, and this infinite flexibility confronts the sport's iconic rectangles with an anti-shape of mere open space.[83] Wittgenstein's theory of the ball's contained yet infinite movement may of course also be applied to squash, football, baseball, hockey, Jai Alai – indeed, to any and every sport featuring balls, with the possible exception of bowls and boules. But tennis's madly liberated balls receive a further nudge into the realm of the unknown by the extra maths of their spin, which, in an age of wide and tightly strung rackets, in which shots without spin are rare enough to be remarked upon by commentators,[84] brings tennis into closer alignment with Wittgenstein's paradox. By introducing 'unimaginable angles' into their work, Nabokov and Wallace likewise show us how novels whose landscape we are sometimes at home in may suddenly become elusive. What is at stake in reading these texts is precisely our sense of belonging in them.

In *Lolita*, the idea of the novel as a space that simultaneously invites us to lay claim to it and keeps us out is dramatized by a territorially-motivated quarrel between Lolita and Humbert. Humbert's demand that Lolita show him all the 'hiding places' in her bedroom is a response to her threat to cheat on him, and marks the climax of an argument about her tale-telling and Humbert's solution of taking her away. Strikingly, this fight over space and privacy is itself mediated through paraphrases and vague descriptions that keep the reader out of the text's 'hiding places.' At the beginning of their screaming match, Humbert declares: 'From that moment, I stopped restraining my voice, and we continued yelling at each other',[85] and yet all we actually hear him yell is: 'go upstairs and show me all [your] hiding places.'[86] Nor do we see them walk upstairs:

> It was a strident and hateful scene. I held her by her knobby wrist and she kept turning and twisting it this way and that, surreptitiously trying to find a weak point so as to wrench herself free at a favorable moment, but I held her quite hard and in fact hurt her rather badly for which I hope my heart may rot, and once or twice she jerked her arm so violently that I feared her wrist might snap, and all the while she stared at me with those unforgettable eyes where cold anger and hot tears struggled, and our voices were drowning the telephone, and when I grew aware of its ringing she instantly escaped.[87]

It is like hearing a fight with the sound switched off and a voiceover superimposed over it. Their neighbours complain that they can hear everything, but we hear nothing we can trust, and all we can see is Humbert's hand clasped around a spinning wrist. Anticipating their tennis match thirty

pages later, Lolita appears here as the opposite of the girl who fills the court with her body, since all her concentration now is focussed on the one action she will not perform with a racket in her hand – twisting her wrist. There is a vivid crescendo in the causal chain of subordinate conjunctions, though we are told that not even the shriek of the telephone is audible until their grammatical climax has been reached. What Lolita and Humbert hear and see, what they realise about each other, and what they protect from each other's view – everything that the crescendo means to them – is at once legible to us and slanted in a way that troubles our purchase on the text's meaning. It is as though it were Lolita who played against us here, making herself and her environment, and ours too, invisible through spin.

Wallace writes in an essay on Michael Joyce that 'a child's world [...] is very serious and very small',[88] and that, for all their reliance on adult calmness, tennis players are fundamentally child-like in the way they preserve the serious, small worlds of their commitment to tennis from the encroachments of life. Lolita protecting her bedroom, Mike protecting his bedroom, Lolita protecting her half of the court, and Hal protecting himself from liars by close reading their spin, are all engaged in defending a space whose boundaries they take seriously. In their fear of encroachment they resemble the reader who may not see 'vistas too large for the eye to contain' or interpret the 'spin coming in' on the seams of a ball (or a style), and so questions her old entitlement to the space of reading, but even more, they resemble the modern American author, whose work plunged him into a public arena of thousands of eyes. At the dawn of modern, technically dense – and thus better armed – tennis in the late nineteenth century, the U.S. distinguished itself from the U.K. by setting out to democratise the sport, countering the perception that tennis could only be played regularly by people with inherited land, through the introduction of an array of public courts. The American player Maurice McLoughlin whom Trinity's Wilding beat in the Wimbledon finals of 1913 had trained on the public courts at San Francisco's Golden Gate Park.[89] The advantage of these new courts for those with 'small', 'serious' 'worlds' to protect was that they did not belong to anyone in advance on the basis of an authority derived from outside tennis; they were one's own to conquer inch by inch ('tennis is a game of inches', writes Wallace)[90] through spin and footwork. On the other hand, their public nature also made them vulnerable to usurpation. In the 1950s when Nabokov was writing *Lolita* he played on Cornell's clay courts at the edge of Cascadilla Gorge,[91] a kind of hybrid between private and public, at once accessible to everyone at Cornell and suggestive of a private paradise, with the immense, quiet gorge and waterfall unfolding dreamily behind them. At Cornell and Cambridge, Nabokov had access to shared courts to which he could both lay claim as a college member and approach as though, by playing on them and playing well, he could make them his.

In *Lolita*, Humbert and his ward predominantly play at hotel courts and club courts, but the courts where Lolita makes most progress are those in Colorado at the foot of the so-called 'Champion Hotel' – an invented name designed either by Nabokov to thicken his fiction or by Humbert to hide his tracks – where Humbert becomes neurotically preoccupied with the presence of people he has never met before. On the earlier courts, he recognises tennis coaches and Lolita's friends, while in Colorado he knows no one and is suspicious of everyone. It is in this comparatively public environment that he receives the prank telephone call that, while structurally recalling the ringing telephone that interrupts their earlier quarrel, marks the first stage in Lolita's plan to flee from him to Quilty. For Ronald Bush, Lolita's 'resourcefulness' in this instance exposes the fraudulence of her bad tennis all along.[92] But if she were capable of spin or of reading spin or intercepting it (she is not Hal or Mario), she would not be the victim of Humbert's storytelling – which she remains throughout – while the vivid unevenness between her brilliant 'prehensile' coverage of the court and her missing 'twist' proves that she is at least half interested in playing well. In my reading, Lolita's spatial dominance of her half of the court thinks back to her loss of control over her bedroom's 'hiding places', while the spinning wrist with which she attempts to resist Humbert's invasions asserts itself as a ghostly presence in the Colorado court. The invocation of the first scene in the second, with the telephone call (which we know to recognise as her arranged ploy) clinching the association, creates a complete tennis technique. It is as if the revolution of her wrist made its motion infinite.

Humbert writes that the 'past' is 'impossible',[93] reducing the only certainty of which time can assure anyone to a dream because he may not himself re-enter history. But for Lolita, whose involvement with both Humbert and Quilty is a product of having 'nowhere else to go',[94] and for Hal, whose whole life turns around the Enfield Tennis Academy, it is the future that is impossible. Spin and the court's 'small world' allow them to exist with a tiny amount of autonomy in the present, but the future is a place of dead-ends. In the opening chapter of *Infinite Jest*, Hal becomes fascinated by an 'EXIT' sign in an interview room in Arizona, where a panel of Deans question the 'incongruous' elements of his university application.[95] By now his education at the academy is almost over,[96] and the exit hooks his gaze not simply because he wishes to suspend the interview, but because the Latin translation of the sign – 'HE LEAVES'[97] – permits him to watch his body leaving the room in the third person, without his having to act. The first person is a prison, as the novel's second, single-sentence paragraph: 'I am in here' dramatizes,[98] reducing the grammar of presence to tautology, since to say one is inside oneself is to say nothing at all. It is as though 'I' were incapable of meaningful predication, as though it whirred without propelling anything. The impotence of Hal's stoned 'I' is Wallace's opening gag – a fun

way to start a novel about power play – but it also puts in motion a gloomy meditation on Hal's inability to advance his cause. After this chapter, he becomes 'he', and in this capacity we associate him with the 'spinny' tennis game that earns him the reputation of a promising player. In the book's closing chapters, Hal's 'I' comes back, but by now the tennis court is drenched in snow and makes no sense as a navigable space, and 'I' is coupled once more with a negation of possibility: 'It occurred to me […] with some force that I didn't want to play this afternoon, even if some sort of indoor exhibition-meet came off.'[99] The awareness that he does not want to play 'this afternoon' mounts into a conviction that he does not want to play ever again. Hal begins the novel in the future, unable even to act negatively on his own behalf, and ends it in the past, having been ousted from the court's small world by torrential snow, and restored to an 'I' he does not want. He goes from securing a place 'here' on the courts through a 'he' that may not always or altogether be his – indeed, dizzyingly, the novel's first 'he' does not belong to its protagonist – but at least lets him move, to 'not knowing where I was out there.'

Remembering the courts in Central Illinois where he played as a teen, Wallace includes on his long list of inhospitable tennis conditions their transformation at night into a shadowplay for moths and gnats: 'the whole lit court surface is aflutter with spastic shadows.'[100] The sodium lamps are still on, but the only performers the climate will allow are those with no qualms about being seen or seen in negative. Spin's 'unimaginable angles' are replaced by the lucid bodies with nothing between them and the light. The moths are dying in the act of spatial conquest, imagining the light to navigate them when in fact they are stuck. A dans macabre or operatic swan-song, enacted drunkenly by clowns who do not know what they are doing, this spectacle may be felt to offer itself as a dystopian glimpse of what not just tennis, but fiction, may become, if we let it – a theatre for the oblivious performance of self-torture. Neither Nabokov nor Wallace is crude enough or earnest enough to directly compare teen tennis to the grooming processes of paedophilia, but the parallel is there in their work, as are the intertwined parallels between reading, writing, tennis and the sexualised abuse of power. Wallace and Nabokov thus implicitly urge us to ask what is at stake for our autonomy and theirs when we read them and when they write for us, what ground we and they give up, how the ostensible harmlessness of storytelling may lull us into complacency, and what attending to a story may entail for a captive imagination that does not know where stories start or end or what they are. In fiction, is there ever a shot without spin? At the risk of reading too much seriousness into novels that want us to interpret their smile as proof that they are far away and out of reach, I would venture that the analogies they draw between tennis and writing may challenge us to see their authors' play as more than just jest. It is a mindfuck.

Notes

1. Elizabeth Wilson writes: 'tennis […] is unlike most sports in that a game has no fixed duration', and that a set and match are 'equally of indeterminate duration.' Wilson, *Love Game: A History of Tennis, from Voctorian Pastime to Global Phenomenon* (London: Serpent's Tail, 2015), 23.
2. Nabokov, *Lolita* (London: Penguin, 2000; first published, 1955), 232.
3. Wallace, *Infinite Jest* (London: Abacus, 2008; first published, 1996) 773.
4. *OED*, online edition.
5. Leonard Cassuto, 'General Introduction', *The Cambridge History of the American Novel*, ed. Leonard Cassuto, Care Virginia Eby & Benjamin Reiss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019; first published, 2011), 1.
6. Quoted in Vladimir Nabokov, *The Annotated Lolita* (London: Penguin, 2000; this annotated edition was first published in 1971), 418.
7. Wallace, *String Theory: David Foster Wallace on Tennis* (New York: Little, Brown & Company, 2016), 134.
8. Peck, 'Well, duh: Review of David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*', *London Review of Books*, 18: 14 (July 18th 1996), online edition.
9. Eggers, 'Foreword', *Infinite Jest*, xv.
10. Amis, 'Review in *The Spectator*, November 6th 1959', *Vladimir Nabokov: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Norman Page (London: Routledge, 1995; first published, 2013), 103.
11. Simon Karlinsky writes in his introduction to their correspondence: 'The crack in the relationship caused by Wilson's dislike of *Bend Sinister* must have widened into a fissure with his reaction to *Lolita* […] In November 1954 Wilson read it and informed Nabokov that he had 'liked it less than anything you wrote."' Karlinsky, 'Introduction: Dear Bunny, Dear Volodoya; or, Affinities and Disagreements', *Dear Bunny, Dear Volodoya: The Nabokov-Wilson Letters, 1940-1971*, ed. Karlinsky (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 26.
12. Peck, online edition.
13. Amis, 102.
14. 'As soon as a fact is *narrated* no longer with a view to acting directly on reality but intransitively […] the author enters into his own death, writing begins.' Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), 142.
15. Quoted in Frank Cioffi's 'An Anguish Become Thing: Narrative as Performance in David Foster Wallace's *The Pale King*', *Narrative*, 8: 2 (May, 2000), 166.
16. Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, 896.
17. Ibid.
18. Nabokov, *Lolita* (London: Penguin, 2000; first published, 1955), 314.
19. Wilson, *Dear Bunny, Dear Volodoya: The Nabokov-Wilson Letters, 1940-1971*, 320.
20. 'Austen uses a device that I call the knight's move, a sudden swerve to one or the other side of the board.' Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature*, ed. Fredson Bowers (San Diego: A Harvest Book, 2017; first published, 1982), 57.
21. Karshan, *Vladimir Nabokov and the Art of Play* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 2.
22. Bush, 'Tennis by the Book', *Transitional Nabokov*, ed. William Norman & Duncan White (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009), 265-284.

23. 'It seems possible to construe a rally as a single sex act' and 'winning [...] as an attainable climax.' Rowe, *Nabokov's Deceptive World* (New York: New York University Press, 1971), 145.
24. Quoted in Bush, 269.
25. Nabokov, *Lolita*, 232.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
28. Boyd, *Nabokov: The American Years* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 237.
29. Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, 110.
30. Wallace, *Infinite* Jest, 773.
31. 'In the 1970s, it was found that yellow tennis balls were easier to see, especially on television, and today's tennis balls are generally fluorescent yellow.' John Grasso, *Historical Dictionary of Tennis* (Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, 2011), 280.
32. Robert Edelman & Wayne Wilson, *The Oxford Handbook of Sports* History (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 289.
33. Stephen G. Miller, *Ancient Greek Athletics* (Yale University Press, 2004), 175.
34. Kenkle greets Hal as 'Good prince Hal', confirming the allusion. Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, 875.
35. Shakespeare, *Henry V*, ed. T. W. Craik (London: Arden, 2005; first published, 1995), 148.
36. Nabokov, *Lectures on Russian Literature*, ed. Fredson Bowers (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1981), 234.
37. Anonymous, *The Trinity Magazine*, 3 (June 1922), 89. Consulted at the archives in the Wren Library, Trinity College, Cambridge.
38. Elizabeth Wilson, *Love Game: A History of Tennis, from Victorian Pastime to Global Phenomenon* (London: Profile Books, 2015; first published, 2014), 36.
39. The letters from the period archived at the Wren library are full of references to tennis clothes and shoes. See www.archives.trin.cam.uk
40. Anonymous, 'Lawn Tennis.' *Trinity Magazine*, 7: 2 (May 1921) 92.
41. OED, online edition.
42. Wallace, *String Theory*, 134.
43. Wilding, *On the Court and Off* (New York: Doubleday, 1913), 18.
44. *OED*, online edition.
45. Wallace, *String Theory*, 130.
46. Wallace, *String Theory*, 134.
47. Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, 105.
48. Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction with a New Epilogue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000; first published, 1966), 50.
49. Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, 984.
50. Nabokov, *Lolita*, 205.
51. Wallace, *Infinite* Jest, 773.
52. Kelly, 'David Foster Wallace and the New Sincerity in American Fiction', *Consider David Foster Wallace*, ed. David Herring (Los Angeles: Sideshow Media Group Press, 2010), 134.
53. Kelly, 143.
54. 'Rather than beginning, like Updike, with familiar human perspectives, Wallace starts with abstraction and then uses the human element to subvert rigid technocratic patterns.' Giles, 'Sentimental Posthumanism: David Foster Wallace',*Twentieth Century Literature*, 53: 3 (Fall 2007), 333.

55. Freudenthal reads the novel as an exloration of ‘the positive potential of anti-interiority’, focussing on how, for Wallace’s addicts, subjectivity may become a ‘generative embrace of materiality’ rather than a site of self-absorption. Freudenthal, ‘Anti-Interiority: Compulsiveness, Objectification and Identity in *Infinite Jest*’, *New Literary History*, 41: 1(Winter 2010), 205.
56. Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, 685.
57. Wallace, *Infinite* Jest, 684.
58. Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, 685.
59. *OED*, online edition.
60. Wallace, *Infinite Jest,* 685.
61. Wallace, *Infinite* Jest, 684.
62. Dated to the thirtheenth century. *OED*, online edition.
63. Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, 684.
64. Ibid.
65. Wallace, *String Theory*, 131.
66. Wallace, *String Theory*, 102.
67. Ibid.
68. Christian Amer, *The American Heritage Dictionary of Idioms: American English Idiomatic Expresions and Phrases* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013; first published, 1992), 29.
69. Wallace believed his success in tennis to stem from the ability to ‘Play the Whole Court.’ Wallace, *String* Theory, 4.
70. Another coinage of the late 1900s. Amer, 160.
71. OED, online edition.
72. According to Alfred Appel in *The Annotated Lolita*, 418.
73. Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, 324.
74. Ibid.
75. Nabokov, *Lolita*, 232.
76. Brian Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The Russian Years* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1990), 175.
77. Nabokov, *Lolita*, 231.
78. Ibid.
79. Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, 260.
80. Wallace, *String Theory*, 9.
81. Wallace, *String Theory*, 15.
82. Ibid.
83. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker & Joachim Schulte (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010; first published, 1953), xcvii.
84. Commentators on Nadal’s triumph in the Australian open of January 30th 2022 were struck by his lack of spin. I would like to thank my Exeter student, Milo Chetwynd-Talbot, for alerting me to this.
85. Nabokov, *Lolita*, 205.
86. Ibid.
87. Ibid.
88. Wallace, *String Theory*, 67.
89. Wilson, 19.
90. Wallace, *String Theory*, 132.
91. Boyd, *Nabokov: The American Years*, 131.
92. Bush, 277.

93. Nabokov, *Lolita*, 282.
94. Nabokov, *Lolita*, 142.
95. Wallace, *Infinite Jest*.
96. It is worth adding that I understand this episode to come after the end of the novel's story, based on one of Hal's interviewers' claims that he 'will graduate one month from now' and in spite of the curve balls issued by Wallace's curious dating of his chapters. Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, 3.
97. Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, 8.
98. Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, 3.
99. Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, 954.
100. Wallace, *String Theory*, 4.

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