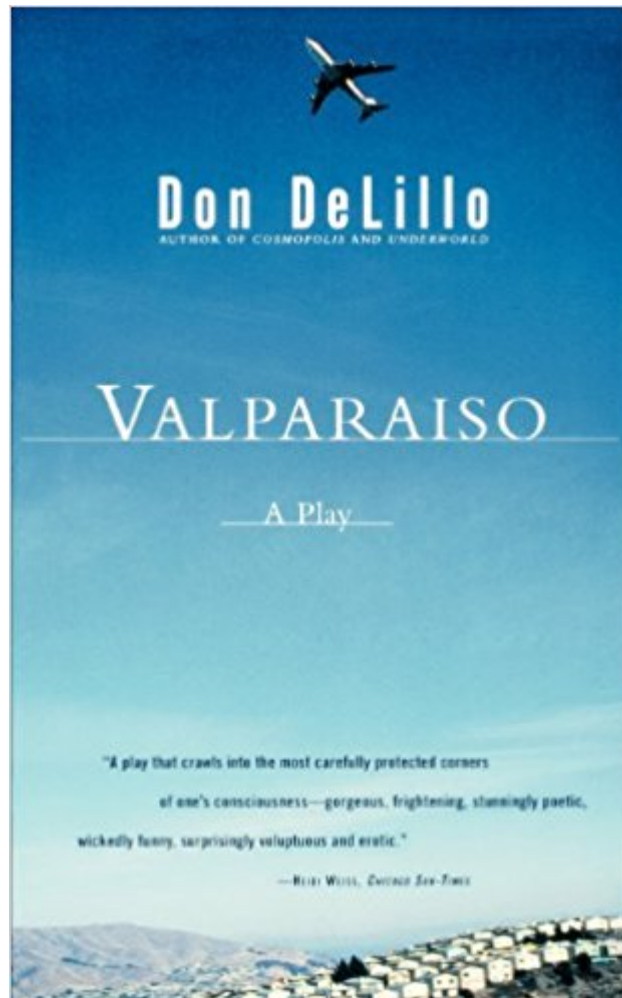


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# Valparaiso: A Play



## Synopsis

A man sets out on an ordinary business trip to Valparaiso, Indiana. It turns out to be a mock-heroic journey toward identity and transcendence. This is Don DeLillo's second play, and it is funny, sharp, and deep-reaching. Its characters tend to have needs and desires shaped by the forces of broadcast technology. This is the way we talk to each other today. This is the way we tell each other things, in public, before listening millions, that we don't dare to say privately. Nothing is allowed to be unseen. Nothing remains unsaid. And everything melts repeatedly into something else, as if driven by the finger on the TV remote. This is also a play that makes obsessive poetry out of the language of routine airline announcements and the flow of endless information.

Valparaiso has been performed by the American Repertory Theatre in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and by the Steppenwolf Theatre Company in Chicago.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Ed Siegel The boston Globe Valparaiso may be the novelist's most satisfying work since White Noise....Valparaiso is art at its finest.Kane Webb Arkansas Democrat Gazette [A] sugar rush of a story...Valparaiso is a terrific read.

Don DeLillo is the author of fifteen novels, including Zero K, Underworld, Falling Man, White Noise, and Libra. He has won the National Book Award, the PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction, the Jerusalem Prize for his complete body of work, and the William Dean Howells Medal from the

American Academy of Arts and Letters. In 2010, he was awarded the PEN/Saul Bellow Prize. His story collection *The Angel Esmeralda* was a finalist for the 2011 Story Prize and the PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction.

Neo-Classical work by Delillo. Worth a read.

This is Delillo's second published play to go with (at the time, 1999) his eleven novels. It is a play in two acts with only five characters. Two of the characters, Michael and his wife Livia, appear in both acts. The basis of the play is that they are being interviewed due to a trip Michael took, thinking he was going to Valparaiso, IN and ending up in Valparaiso, Chile. This play takes on many of Delillo's usual topics, just not as well as he does in his novels. Reviewing a reading of a play is always more difficult than a novel or a collection of short stories as you do not enjoy the work of art as it was meant to be presented to you. You can only imagine the interaction between the actors, the way the set looks, the manner and cadences of speaking. As it reads, the play is a darkly comic vision of the way Americans are developed by our media culture. We see the development of Michael through a series of interviews of himself and his wife. Act I has numerous interviews by unnamed interviewers. In these we see Michael developing a larger sense of himself, and his worth, and the worth of his story. We see some interviewers helping him create this sense of self-importance by hanging on his every word. The media culture takes a beating in this play, as it does in most Delillo novels. They want to know everything that happened, everything that didn't happen, what he thought about what happened, what he thought about what didn't happen, what Livia thought, etc. It all has to be documented on their radio or television shows because if it isn't, it didn't happen. Act II has a single television show interview of both Michael and Livia and has an almost Jerry Springer feel to it as Livia at one point announces the child she is pregnant with is not Michael's. This play falls flat in comparison to Delillo's novels and in terms of what it is trying to say. The play form seems too constrictive for Delillo's style. The same problems can be found in his first published play *The Day Room*. Without room to expound his ideas in narrative format, needing to use conversation, and in a tight format, Delillo relies too much on repetition, and topic jumping to make his points. They are made and done so quickly, leaving the reader feeling beaten about the head before Act II is halfway over. Read *Mao II*, or *White Noise* if you want to get a great understanding of Delillo's views of modern day culture; if you only have a little time and feel the need to get a small glimpse of Delillo's talents, read *Valparaiso*.

If you examine Mr. DeLillo's body of work as a whole, each piece plays a part in defining his question: Where/how do we find/create meaning in contemporary society? You (or I, on another day) may disagree with my supposition, and to be fair if his work can be pegged to a central premise, it is likely a tad more subtle and complex, but I think it is a good place to begin. In *Valparaiso*, DeLillo sends us on a preposterous postmodern journey to god knows where (only here, he situates god knows where in Chile). He grabs the uneasy in each of us and throws it up on the stage. "Here, look at this: Remember how uncomfortable contemporary society can make you? When's the last time you had a meaningful conversation with your spouse? When's the last time you had a meaningful thought?" DeLillo adds depth to the otherwise hackneyed proposal that our 'individuality' is merely a creation of our preferences as consumers. His characters here may not reveal their complex inner lives, but one suspects that they may be more than an amalgam of what they buy on or see on cable. Sure maybe it's all affectation. Maybe D's being insincere in the way he poses the questions. I don't think so. I think what you'll find is a smartly crafted, mildly apocalyptic tale of suburban dis-ease. If it works well, you should feel a slight nausea at play's end. *Valparaiso* is very much worth seeing performed by a smart group of actors. It is also very much worth reading.

'*Valparaiso*', DeLillo's latest drama, is a poignant, cynical descension into the depths and trivia of talk show-crazy America. Michael Majewski experiences his five minutes of news stardom as he gets involved in a media frenzy for having involuntarily travelled to *Valparaiso Chile*, while originally starting off for *Valparaiso, Indiana*. Being questioned about his motives for undertaking this journey and successively yielding to the reporters' every attempt of utter exposure, his marriage and finally his very existence come under scrutiny. In the end we see all of this coming to an absurd showdown on a TV talk show, proving that to be 'real' has come to mean 'to be watched' - and vice versa. In this skillfully arranged piece, DeLillo has accomplished to create an uptempo, modern drama: humorous, brilliantly written and relaxed as it befits the genre, yet not quite as daring and ingenious as the novelist DeLillo has time and again proven to be.

"*Valparaiso*" is a play by Don DeLillo. According to the book's copyright page, the play was first performed in 1999 at the American Repertory Theatre in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The play tells the story of Michael Majeski, a man who has attained celebrity status after an unusual journey: his business flight to *Valparaiso, Indiana* had become an unexpected odyssey that was both strange and ridiculous. I read "*Valparaiso*" as a sometimes dark satire on television and the culture of instant celebrity. Majeski's story is also a reflection on individuality and free will (or the seeming lack thereof

in the modern world). This is a surreal piece that is not, in my opinion, wholly effective, but nonetheless contains some sections with both real bite and pathos.

This play differs somewhat from the way in which it was described in a story on NPR. It was characterized as the story of how being the subject of endless interviews leads to a kind of transcendence for the Michael character. However, I would describe it as a logical extension of media-centered society. There is a dream-like quality to much of the play, similar to the best parts of *Underworld*. The plane setting inevitably brings to mind the "gleaming silver death machine" from *White Noise*. It is more outwardly funny than some of his other work, or at least it could be played that way. I hesitate to give it 5 stars in that I found the "Delphina" character to be poorly drawn. Otherwise a very satisfying read for Delillo fans.

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