



Sydney Theatre Company and Ebsworth & Ebsworth present



## Love-Lies-Bleeding

By Don DeLillo

## Teacher's Resource Kit

written and compiled by Jeffrey Dawson

### Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following for their invaluable material for these Teachers' Notes:  
Laura Scrivano, Publications Manager, STC; Filomena Impagnatiello

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## **Important Information**

### *Love-Lies-Bleeding* Schools Day Performance

Date: Wednesday 1 August 2007

Venue: Wharf 1, Walsh Bay

Pre-performance forum 10.30am

Lunch Break 11.15am

Performance commences: 12.15pm

Performance concludes: 1.45pm

**Please note there will be no interval**

Post performance Q+A concludes 2pm

We respectfully ask that you discuss theatre etiquette with your students prior to coming to the performance.

### **Booking Queries**

Please contact Barbara Vickery on 02 9250 1778 or [bvickery@sydneytheatre.com.au](mailto:bvickery@sydneytheatre.com.au)

### **General Education Queries**

Please contact Helen Hristofski, Education Manager, on 02 9250 1726 or [hristofski@sydneytheatre.com.au](mailto:hristofski@sydneytheatre.com.au)

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## Sydney Theatre Company

Sydney Theatre Company (STC) produces theatre of the highest standard that consistently illuminates, entertains and challenges. It is committed to the engagement between the imagination of its artists and its audiences, to the development of the art form of theatre, and to excellence in all its endeavours.

STC has been a major force in Australian drama since its establishment in 1978. It was created by the New South Wales Government, following the demise of the Old Tote Theatre Company. The original intention was to better utilise the Drama Theatre of the Sydney Opera House and the new Company comprised a small central administration staff, technical staff, workshop and rehearsal facilities. Richard Wherrett was appointed Artistic Director from 1979 to 1990.

The Wharf opened on 13 December, 1984 by Premier Neville Wran, which allowed all departments of the Company to be housed under one roof for the first time. The venue was to become the envy of the theatre world. From 1985, the Company could perform in two locations throughout the year, the Drama Theatre and The Wharf. From 1990 to 1999, Wayne Harrison served as Artistic Director. A third regular venue, Sydney Theatre, administered and operated by STC, opened in 2004.

The predominant financial commitment to STC is made by its audience. Of this audience, the Company's subscribers make a crucial commitment. The Company is also assisted annually by grants from the Federal Government through the Australia Council and the New South Wales Government through the Ministry for the Arts. STC also actively seeks sponsorship and donations from the corporate sector and from private individuals.

Under the leadership Artistic Director Robyn Nevin, STC's annual subscription season features up to 12 plays including: recent or new Australian works, interpretations of theatrical classics and contemporary foreign works. In addition STC regularly co-produces and tours productions throughout Australia, playing annually to audiences in excess of 300,000. STC actively fosters relationships and collaborations with international artists and companies. In 2006 STC began a new journey of artistic development with the inception of The Actors Company, the STC ensemble.

**To access detailed information on Sydney Theatre Company, its history and productions please contact our Archivist Judith Seeff at [jseeff@sydneytheatre.com.au](mailto:jseeff@sydneytheatre.com.au)**

## Sydney Theatre Company Education

Sydney Theatre Company is committed to education by programming up to four productions annually plus a range of workshops that enthuse and engage the next generation of theatre-goers. Within the education programme Sydney Theatre Company produces its own season of plays as well as collaborates with leading theatre-for-young-people companies across Australia.

Often a young person's first experience of theatre is facilitated by teachers. STC ensures access to all of its mainstage productions through the **schoolsdays** programme as well as produces and tours theatre specifically crafted to resonate with young people.

STC works to support educators in their Drama and English-teaching practices. Every year dynamic **workshops** are held by leading theatre practitioners to support curriculum content, detailed resources are provided for all productions and an extensive work-experience programme is available to students from across the state.

The annual Sydney Morning Herald and Sydney Theatre Company **Young Playwright's Award** continues to develop and encourage young writers. The winning students receive a cash prize and a two-day workshop with a professional director, dramaturg and cast – an invaluable opportunity and experience.

Sydney Theatre Company has an extensive **on-line resource** for teachers and students. Visit [www.sydneytheatre.com.au/education](http://www.sydneytheatre.com.au/education).

We encourage teachers to subscribe to regular e-news to keep informed as well as access **heavily discounted** tickets and special offers.

For further information on STC Education programme, please contact the Education Manager Helen Hristofski at [hristofski@sydneytheatre.com.au](mailto:hristofski@sydneytheatre.com.au)

## *Love-Lies-Bleeding: Cast and Production Team*

### Cast

ALEX	MAX CULLEN
TOINETTE	ROBYN NEVIN
LIA	PAULA ARUNDELL
SEAN	BENJAMIN WINSPEAR
ALEX (in extremis) the dying Alex	SHAUN GOSS

### Production Team

DIRECTOR	LEE LEWIS
DESIGNER	FIONA CROMBIE
LIGHTING DESIGNER	DAMIEN COOPER
SOUND DESIGNER/COMPOSER	PAUL CHARLIER
PRODUCTION MANAGER	JANET EADES
STAGE MANAGER	ANNA LOSKY
ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGERS	VICTORIA WOOLLEY LARNA BURGESS MUNRO
BACKSTAGE WARDROBE SUPERVISOR	JANE SELDON
THEATRE TECHNICIAN	CAMERON MENZIES
PRODUCTION PHOTOGRAPHER	BRETT BOARDMAN

This production opened on 12 July 2007 at Wharf 1, Sydney Theatre Company.

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## Don DeLillo, Playwright

Don DeLillo, esteemed American writer, was born and raised in New York City and attended Fordham University. Since 1971 he has published fourteen novels and is widely recognised as one of the most distinctive American writers of our day. His novels include, in chronological order, *Americana*, *End Zone*, *Great Jones Street*, *Ratner's Star*, *Players*, *Running Dog*, *The Names*, *White Noise*, *Libra*, *Mao II*, the highly acclaimed *Underworld*, *The Body Artist*, *Cosmopolis* and most recently, *Falling Man*, about the attack on the twin towers of the World Trade Centre on September 11, 2001, *White Noise*, *Libra* and the highly acclaimed *Underworld* all contain extended meditations on death and contamination in 20<sup>th</sup> Century America.

DeLillo has written four plays; *Libra* was adapted by John Malkovich and produced as a play by Steppenwolf Theatre in 1994. Don DeLillo's previous play *The Day Room* was premiered by the American Repertory Theatre in 1987 and was published by Knopf. *Valparaiso* was first seen at American Theatre in 1998, and has since had productions around the world. It is published by Scribner. His latest play, *Love-Lies-Bleeding*, was produced at Steppenwolf in the spring of 2006, and subsequently at the Kennedy Centre. It is also published by Scribner. Often compared to the works of British playwright Harold Pinter and Samuel Beckett, DeLillo's work is notoriously abstract.

Don DeLillo has won many honours, including the National Book Award, the PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction and the Jerusalem Prize.

Ref: Tim Adams, "The Profile: Don DeLillo", in *Spectrum, The Sydney Morning Herald* – Weekend Edition, 9-10/6/07 – "Now 70, DeLillo is on first-name terms with strangeness... He refuses to play the game of self-promotion, preferring to stay outside the literary world.... Sightings of him are rare."

De Lillo grew up in The Bronx, to an Italo-American family, first generation immigrants. He didn't write at all as a child... Discovering *Ulysses* as a teenager made him want to be a writer but his influences and references have always been as much from film and painting and music – European movies, Abstract Expressionism and the jazz of Parker and Mingus – as from novels. He and his wife have no children. He has said in a tone that may be neutral or wistful: "Family complications have not been a source of difficulty for me as they are for almost everyone else." He lives in Westchester, north of New York, suburban, leafy, one step removed from the American "junkspace" that tends to make the life of his novels."

Ref: Anthony Macris, "Review of the Week – *Falling Man* by Don De Lillo", in *Spectrum, The Sydney Morning Herald* – Weekend Edition, 16-17/6/07

"DeLillo (is) a writer who excels in reinterpreting the familiar.... He has based much of his work on making us re-experience what we think we already know, in revealing the dark and miraculous in the everyday. He achieves this once again in *Falling Man*, a sombre and nuanced reflection on how a decisive turning point in American (and global) history affects a single family... DeLillo develops this fraught family scenario with masterly skill, showing not only how traumatic events transform our most intimate relationships, but also putting them in a broader political context.

Lianne, one of the novel's main characters, runs a writing group for seniors suffering from Alzheimer's disease. After the September 11 attack, she encourages them to write their responses to the event, as much to purge their feelings as to help keep their fading consciousnesses alive."

“DeLillo obviously has a strong novelistic voice but he has really found his rich playwright’s voice in *Love-Lies-Bleeding*, including interrupted dialogue, random thoughts, thoughts from 20 years ago,” Lee Lewis pointed out at STC’s Subscriber Briefing on July 2 07.

## Lee Lewis, Director

After reading the playwright’s script, the director decides on an overall vision for the production. The director meets with the creative team to achieve a unified look for the sets, costumes, lighting, sound and other elements. The director oversees the actors in rehearsal, often with the help of an assistant director and always with stage managers.

As an emerging director, Lee Lewis’s career has been blooming. After successful seasons in Sydney’s independent theatre scene, Lee directed *Stag* for Wharf2LOUD’s first PUSH season and was the recipient of the 2007 Richard Wherrett Directing Fellowship. She has recently directed *The Nightwatchman* for Griffin Theatre Company and was overwhelmed with excitement at making her STC mainstage debut with *Love-Lies-Bleeding*. Lee is also an actor and writer of the recent Currency House essay, *Cross-racial Casting – Changing the Face of Australian Theatre*.

## Memory and Territory

### Interview with Lee Lewis

**“YOU NEED TO HOLD HARD TO LIFE.”**

**LIA**

**“WHY ARE WE CLUSTERED AROUND HIM? NOT BECAUSE HE’S A LOVING HUSBAND AND FATHER WHOSE LIFELONG DEVOTION. NOT BECAUSE HE’S THE PATRIARCH OF A TEEMING FAMILY. LOOK AT US. THE THREE SURVIVORS. BARE BONES IN TRIPPLICATE. NOT BECAUSE WE FEEL INDEBTED IN ANYWAY – I DON’T. OR MORALLY, SOMEHOW, OBLIGATED – I’M NOT. OR NEED HIS FINAL BLESSING – TOO LATE FOR THAT. IT’S MORE ELEMENTAL ISN’T IT? WE ARE HERE TO HELP HIM DIE.”**  
**TOINETTE**

When STC presented *Love-Lies-Bleeding* in July, director Lee Lewis wasn’t just grappling with a play of confronting ideas. She was entering the world of Don DeLillo, one of the central figures of literary post-modernism, the first American winner of the Jerusalem prize and the author of best sellers such as *White Noise* and *Underworld*. DeLillo is famous for painting detailed portrayals of American life, often delving into the complexities of the modern family, consumerism, art and ego. For Lee, her love affair with DeLillo’s work began as soon she read *Love-Lies-Bleeding*.

“What attracted me was that it was, for an American play about fear of death, completely unsentimental,” says Lee. “It didn’t have that American big climax scene where someone breaks down and their heart pours out and everything gets tied up. It’s a really smart play around a really difficult subject.”

The characters in *Love-Lies-Bleeding* are bound together by Alex Macklin, an artist of vigour and influence who, at 70, is close to death. Three people will decide his fate. Lia, his young wife is determined to allow him to find a natural death despite his almost unconscious state. His ex-wife Toinette and his son Sean wish to help him leave the world with dignity, believing he would not wanted to end his days in drip-



feed existence. Despite dealing with a contentious and emotionally wrought subject, it was the humour in the play that allowed to Lee to contemplate directing *Love-Lies-Bleeding*.

“There is dryness in the play, and a wit and an irony which is very New York. Being from New York means reading the play felt like coming home to a certain extent. The humour in it was quite compelling,” enthuses Lee. “He writes relationships between men and women so well. He has a great understanding of that conversation between a husband and wife or, in this case, a husband and their various wives!”

“What is really exciting about this play is that this is the first one of his where he is actually letting his real writing voice be present on the stage. The other plays he has written are good plays but *Love-Lies-Bleeding* is really part of his larger body of work. It is a lot more unwieldy than his other plays, structurally, because it is starting to reflect his novel writing structure which has this great wandering epic form. You can see the fascinations that he has – he is always writing about artists and their relationship to their work and the world. He writes about powerful men and the women that are around them. He discusses that tension between the New York urban mentality and the rest of the American landscape. It’s so exciting to have that richness there,” says Lee.

“I knew it was going to be a difficult play for the actors to do. It is such a heart rending situation to go through on a night by night basis. All of the cast love the play but it is a hard place to go to. On some plays we ask our actors to do superhuman things - sacrifice themselves I suppose, so that we can look at the issue in a way that is less difficult for us,” says Lee.

Those familiar with DeLillo’s work will recognise the detail and depth of *Love-Lies – Bleeding*, with complex themes and metaphors weaving through the tapestry of the play. DeLillo finds a space to explore the artist’s relationship to the landscape and the difficulty of family relationships. It is this layering, Lee says, that makes *Love-Lies-Bleeding* much more than a single issue play.

“It’s interesting to me that sense of the New York encounter with the south west because every major American artist of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century has engaged with it on some level,” explains Lee. The relationship between the desert and the landscape and the light and writers and artists has been phenomenal. Those male ego artists – they weren’t trying to have a spiritual connection with the land – they were meeting the land head on. It was like this challenge – the American frontier. Alex is such an alpha male and we don’t have a lot of those here. We have mates and larrikins these men are like forces of nature.”

The title of the play, *Love-Lies-Bleeding* is taken from a desert plant, a metaphor that re-occurs throughout the piece. Lee says for her the central metaphor is about memory and territory – how you own someone through the memories of them that you have. “The relationship that these women have with this artist and his relationship with the land are at the core of the play. They don’t have the relationship with the land, he does. And it was his relationship to these plants, his fascination. It is a question of whether you share that with him or whether you didn’t share that with him as to how much of him that you own. It’s one of the ways they struggle over they the right to decide for him. Who has the greater right? Who is closer to him? Who had a better understanding of him and how do you prove that? It becomes one of the ways you hang to people – you hang onto the things that they loved,” Says Lee.

“*Love-Lies-Bleeding* is a very clever play in that it doesn’t ask you to reach a decision about the issue,” Explains Lee. There isn’t some big solution offered. There

isn't some big judgement offered. And yet it is not an indecisive play – it's not as if it doesn't have opinions and doesn't offer them forth in the shape of these characters. It's these people grappling with the information we all have. Yet none of it helps you when you are sitting next to someone that you have loved.”

For Lee, DeLillo's play allows the audience into a space where they can experience issues of death, without confronting them with accusations or judgements. It is this quality, she says, that makes the play a great play, rather than just a good one.

“That's what the big plays try and do – let you be in a confronting space for a little while so that you walk out and say 'what would we do?' It allows that little conversation to start happening, ones that people know they have to have but they don't know how to get into. The fiction allows you to start having that conversation in a gentler way.”

Ref: Laura Scrivano in *Currents*, STC's Subscriber Magazine, Vol.25, No.2, June 2007

## Plot Synopsis

To familiarise students with the story, ask them to read through the play synopsis below. Write down their initial response to the story, which they can reflect back on, after you have seen the play.

*Love-Lies-Bleeding* is a new American three act play about a family coping with the dilemma of euthanasia, while their own vested interests intervene. It deals in a non-judgmental way about the idea of hastening death, and in so doing, deals with what constitutes a life.

An artist patriarch is on life support, and family members converge to decide what is to be done...

Alex Macklin (Max Cullen) remembers, as a child, seeing a dead man on the subway. Now an artist of some renown, Alex has lived a vigorous and influential life. But at 70 he is again close to death.

Three people will decide his fate. His ex-wife Toinette (Robyn Nevin) and his adult son (Benjamin Winspear) are keen to help him depart this world – he would not have wanted to end his life in a drip-fed limbo, they believe. His young wife Lia (Paula Arundell), however, is determined that he be allowed to survive his full time, no matter his level of apparent consciousness.

She knows that Alex is tenacious, just like the exotic desert plants that he loved – the Joshua tree, larkspurs and love-lies-bleeding. She knows that he will fight.

Alex's frozen existence is now just more unfinished business, though, and who can really claim to shape it in his name? What quality is mercy? What value a life? Richly imagined, surprisingly amusing and starkly unnerving, this is a shrewd piece of drama and a potent meditation on mortality: how do we reconcile living with dying, dying with living?

*Love-Lies-Bleeding* does not merely explore the two sides of the ethical debate of euthanasia, instead focusing on the interpersonal ramifications of one family's story.

*“Love-Lies-Bleeding* is DeLillo's austere consideration of how enlightened humankind tries to assert primacy over forces beyond its control. The play attempts to add poignancy to Alex's condition with the suggestion of potential unfulfilled and a vision yet to be realised. The uncertainty of how much cognition he has now seems a reflection of the ambiguity that has dogged his talent and his ability to care for others throughout his life. There's a kind of cruel twist in the fact that with his diminished capacity, his fate is in the hands of a son....who has expressed deep ambivalence about the old man.”

Peter Marks, *Washington Post*

## Setting

A spacious room in an old house, remotely located in a desert landscape, the south-western Nevada/Arizona border. (Alex's friends believe he's there "to find peace of mind. The age-old idiot whimsy.")

The set is spare and semi-abstract, with subdued lighting and a few pieces of well worn furniture, including a sofa. There is also a metal stand equipped with an intravenous feeding setup. In several scenes a limited sector of the stage functions as a playing area.

The set is in a J configuration. Designer Fiona Crombie explains:

The set is non-naturalistic, domestic yet the landscape is represented in a poetic way. The set gives a sense of distance; it is exposing, giving the characters nowhere to hide. It is dry, hard and glary, which befits the harsh light in the Nevada region. It is a 'shipwreck of a room.' DeLillo has said, 'I wanted a minimum of systems. There are feeding tubes, but I didn't want a hospital or a hospital bed. I wanted him sitting in a chair. That was very important to me.'

## Structure

*Love-Lies-Bleeding* is intricately plotted, representing a series of events alternating among the present, recent past and near future.

### Act One

Scene 1 – Alex and Lia – one year before the main action of the play.

Scene 2 – Toinette and Sean – present time

Scene 3 – Toinette, Lia and Sean – the sitting figure; present time

Scene 4 – Toinette and Lia – the sitting figure, eyes closed

Scene 5 – Toinette and Sean. The sitting figure, eyes closed, head slumped.

Scene 6 – Toinette and Lia. The sitting figure, as in previous scene.

Scene 7 – Sean's eulogy for his father.

Scene 8 – Toinette, Sean and Lia. The sitting figure, head up, eyes shut.

Scene 9 – same as 8

Scene 10 – same as 8 & 9; Alex is upright in his chair, eyes open.

Scene 11 – same characters – the next day; the sitting figure, head flung back and to one side, mouth wide open, eyes shut.

Scene 12 – Toinette and Sean

Scene 13 – Sean and Lia; she moistens Alex's lips with a soft cloth.

### Act Two

Alex and Toinette six years before the main action of the play and Alex is in vigorous health, Toinette travel-weary. They're seen in flashback, talking about Alex's most inspired project, an effort to carve a room into a mountain. The question that bedevils him is whether to add more man-made texture to his design, to paint what he's created. (One critic has said, "The parallel to the final riddle Alex's illness provokes is made fairly explicit.")

## Act Three

Scene 1 – Dim interior of the room- present time. The sitting figure of Alex – the intravenous stand and feeding tubes are gone. His eyes are closed, head slumped.

There is a bottle of morphine on a side table – Sean and Lia

Scene 2 Sean and Toinette – they are due to carry out Alex’s “terminal sedation.”

Scene 3 – Sean and the sitting figure of Alex, head raised, eyes open. Bottle of morphine partly diminished.

Scene 4 – Toinette and Sean. She stands behind the sitting figure, holding his head upright. His eyes are closed.

Scene 5 – Room set is dark – Lia speaks at Alex’s memorial service.

Scene 6 – Toinette and Sean. The sitting figure, head slumped. Toinette exhausted. Sean stands, holding a plastic bag and duct tape.

Scene 7 – Lia sits next to the figure of Alex. The bottle of morphine is nearly empty. Toinette stands in a corner of the room.

Scene 8 – Toinette and Sean, the latter asleep on the sofa. The bottle of morphine is empty.

Scene 9 – Alex and Lia, One year before the main action of the play, as in Act I

Scene 1. They are isolated from the room set, which is dark except for a sliver of light on the sitting figure, feeding tubes not visible. There is a bowl with food.

## Character Summaries

*"The characters in my play are starkly isolated, with no interest from, or guidance by, such outside forces (as) doctors, lawyers, clergymen and judges... Most people, I think, depend on doctors to guide them. I wanted to write a play where that was not the issue... I wanted them to be dealing simply with their own feelings, emotions and predilections. " DeLillo*

### Alex Macklin

A 70 year old artist, once vigorous and influential, who, is now comatose and close to death, once free spirited, now invalid; an extreme case; a man of conflicted desires and flagging stamina. Alex has been married four times. Once a proponent of Land Art: in the 1970s: *"Art that's hidden in a mountain. An incredible sort of stone enclosure that you would drench with paintings of your dreams,"* Toinette tells us in Act 2. Alex is interested in plants. Land Artists made monumental works in the desert, having bought cheap land that couldn't be farmed. It was work on a grand scale, which nonetheless did not bring Alex fame or fortune. The play looks back at Alex's life.

Two actors appear as Alex – one plays the character in three episodes that precede his main action. The other plays Alex in extremis as a helpless, motionless figure, attached to hydration and feeding tubes.

Three people will eventually decide Alex's fate. His life is in crisis. But these three relationships are compelling.

At the start of the play, which prefigures the main action of the play by a year, Alex appears haggard after a stroke, seated in a wheelchair, isolated from the room set – Alex in extremis. His speech is laboured. Across the stage, in scant light, barely visible, there is the sitting figure of a man. In the second scene in the present, Alex has suffered a massive second stroke. Toinette tells her step-son Sean about Alex that: *"finally what we shared was silence. The entire last year. Everything became internal. Shapeless and motionless. Vaguely sinister. Each of us wishing the other dead in a car crash. I'd sit and study that look of his. Angry and dangerous. Always a question in it. He's puzzled by something. ...Our car crashes were different. In my mind, Alex was the only victim. Lying there looking okay, actually, sort of presentably dead.....All right I wanted him dead at times. But not scattered into smoky little pieces."*

In Act I Scene 7, Sean tells us in his eulogy for his father that: *"he was the measure of a man who did great and famous work. But he wasn't great and he wasn't famous. And we share, somewhere lurking, some of us, a small dismal pleasure in this knowledge... He absorbed certain people, consumed and absorbed them. You know this. Those he didn't consume he left standing in the street somewhere."*

In Act 2, we learn from Alex that he and Toinette were *"hooked into each other. We had the same smell. We had the same bad breath. We said everything two people can say... You were like smoke. I closed my eyes and walked on through."* Later he tells her, *"You think I'm crazy but I'm not crazy enough. I want to throw off doubt, stop thinking, stop caring, just be, just work. Throw off who I am, goddam it. A bare room without a signature."* (Land Art). Ironically this speech prefigures Alex's strokes.

### Alex in Extremis

Alex is in what doctors call "a persistent vegetative state" – no cognitive response. He is present, silent and still in the space. (The actor playing him thus, Shaun Goss, has undergone a delicate process of preparation for the role, including yoga.) He

represents Alex in the present. He is a physical being, not a puppet or a dummy, for he is a life force, a man sitting in a straight-backed chair. Throughout the play, Alex sits onstage like a silent witness to his own trial.

### **Toinette**

Alex's brittle, estranged second wife, late fifties; their marriage lasted eleven years, having met him when she was 22 – Alex says in Act 2, *“Long time. Or not so long. Seemed long, didn't it?”* They endured a volatile relationship. Together with her step-son Sean, (she has been more a parent to Sean than Alex has. She has maintained a relationship with Sean.) Toinette wishes to help her ex-husband Alex leave the world with dignity, believing he would not want to end his days in drip-feed existence, although she hadn't kept up a relationship with Alex for many years. She thinks he should be put out of his misery. When the couple split, Toinette edited children's books for a living, dated younger men “with problems” and attended theatre and had dinner parties. She is a minor New York intellectual. She lives a solitary life. She is involved in the intellectual life of New York but she is not a direct contributor. Alex always believed that Toinette *“looked like money,”* but she never had much.

In Act I Scene 2, Toinette tells her step-son Sean about Alex that *“There were times, I swear, when we were living in the same skin. That's how I remember it and that's what I want to believe. Makes it easier to understand how we could live as enemies, off and on, for as long as we did. I'm here to be with him, that's all. I want to be close – close as we can get, he and I. I've been here before... It was six or seven years ago, and many years after he and I had lost contact. The old furies were not so intense. I guess we both felt this telepathically. He called out of nowhere. This is nowhere, isn't it? Said come visit for a few days.”* Later she says, *“He hated my name. He called me Toilette for a year and a half.”*

Toinette tells Lia that Sean is obsessed with Alex – yet they both are really: *“Sean wants to know everything his father said and did. He's a little twisted on the subject.”* She believes that they will never get Lia's consent to turn off Alex's life support system. Toinette and Sean conclude that because Alex lacks apparent brain function, the essential Alex has ceased to exist.

*“Why are we clustered around him? Not because he's a loving husband and father whose lifelong devotion. Not because he's the patriarch of a teeming family. Look at us. The three survivors. Bare bones in triplicate. Not because we feel indebted in anyway – I don't. Or morally, somehow, obligated – I'm not. Or need his final blessing – too late for that. It's more elemental isn't it? We're here to help him die.”* To which Lia replies, *“He's not ready yet.”*

In Act I Scene 12, Toinette feels bonded with Sean, but *“we're also trapped in a way. (in their shared view on euthanasia) Stuck with each other because of him, and stuck with him...and it's the gravest sort of responsibility.”* Yet even in the past, we learn in Act 2 that they talk (on the phone) *“because you're (Alex) rooted in our lives. We're too weak to let you go, or too hollow. .... I'm not sure how it works but men who don't know themselves have a power over others, those who try miserably to understand.”*

In Act 2 Toinette says she knows why Alex had retreated to the desert: *“Risk everything. There's no safety net here. It's all one thing. The art, the artist, the landscape, the sky.”*

Toinette lives in New York. After Alex's eventual death, Toinette seeks reassurance from Lia: *“I trust you. I want you to tell me we're not fools”* To which she replies,

*“Everything that matters is pressed between these walls. In this sickroom. And I don’t know if I can bear it anymore.”*

### **Lia**

Alex’s young, fourth and final wife, early thirties; his current lover and caregiver; lives on a homestead with Alex, determined to allow him to find a natural death despite his almost unconscious state. She had a comparatively calm relationship at first with Alex, particularly compared to Toinette, but it was tumultuous after his strokes for 7 months. She kept him in good condition in a remote area. Lia has only ever known Toinette for half a day before the main action of the play; she has not known Sean for much longer. He tells Toinette that Lia *“does everything one person can do for another (for Alex). A male fantasy of the caring woman, not really. She’s not a little house sparrow. She’s smart and tough. Stubborn too.....She shaves him every day. Cuts his hair every few days whether it’s growing or not.”*

Lia believes, concerning euthanasia, *“You need to hold hard to life.”*

She says in Act I Scene 8:

Lia How he dies. This is what we live with forever.

Sean End his pain. We can live with this, can’t we? Euthanasia. Good death.

Lia: His death at your hands. This is what you’ll live with. What’s your method? Injection, asphyxiation. You think there’s such a thing as a good death. So do I. It’s when the living do not interfere according to their needs. Let him die in his time.

Sean: His brain has shrunk. We know this. The CAT scan told us. The situation is hopeless. There is no hope.”

After Alex’s 2nd stroke:

Lia The massive insult to the brain

Lia He is in a place that is blessed by death. He is in last life. This is exalted time. No one has the right to deprive him of this.

In Act One Scene 11:

Lia If he’d wanted to die, he would have done it himself. There was time for this. He was sick and weak but able to do things and able to understand what was ahead... He has the right to suffer. This is what being in the world means. At times we suffer.

*“You’re the one blessing I know,”* Alex tells Lia one year before the final stroke comes, *“The last of the body.”*

### **Sean**

Alex and his first wife’s son, thirty five - the only child, Alex’s only descendant, yet estranged; lives somewhere in Pennsylvania, teaches wealthy students geophysics, yet they ‘deal drugs’ in a private academy. Has a profoundly bad relationship with his father yet is “joined” to his step-mother Toinette.

In Act I Scene 2, Toinette tells her impassive step-son Sean that he should get his own life, not live vicariously through his father Alex. Yet she has a co-dependent relationship with Sean, “almost unhealthy”, according to actor Robyn Nevin.

In Act 2 Scene 1, Toinette tells Alex in flashback *“There’s no moment too fleeting for Sean. He wants to hear everything. The little cookbook of human motive. Unknown motive. The near nightly drama of Alex murderously brooding.”*



In Act I Scene 3, Sean tells Lia that when she positioned her comatose husband Alex to face an electrical storm, that *“what he’s (Alex) showing is pure reflex. The storm is a powerful stimulus. He’s showing meaningless body response. There’s no awareness, no consciousness. He’s not aware of you or me or anything else. He isn’t conscious. And he isn’t Alex. Eyes open. This means nothing. Eyes blinking. Means nothing. Hands moving. Nothing. He can’t think. He doesn’t know what you’re saying to him. You are not Lia. He is not Alex.”* Yet in Scene 12 he tells Toinette that Alex *“can hear every word we say.”*

In Scene 13 Sean tells Lia that they *“need to be released, all of us. He’s sitting here and he’s holding us back... He needs to be released... There’s no one there. He can’t recover the slightest shred of identity. His eyes are cold ash. No longer and not yet. It’s wrong to keep him suspended. Do the hard thing (Lia) out of love, not despair. Let the man die.”*

Toinette tells Lia that Sean *“says things because he believes he’s expected to say them. He says what a person like him would say. There’s something generic about Sean. He’s like someone who’s like him.”* Toinette assures Lia that *“What we do for someone else, someone we love. It’s the truest kind of human beauty.”*

In Act 3 Scene 3 Sean says that his father is *“the cold-blooded bastard is a painter in a studio.”* As a father figure, Alex cast an extraordinary shadow on Sean, who consciously creates an opposite life to his father. Sean, according to actor Ben Winspear, ‘has a mania for correctness and procedure. He arrives with a mercy killing plan of how to overcome hurdles. He ends up strong and failing.’

## Glossary

Here is a glossary of the plants that Toinette lists to Alex in his comatose state to seemingly engage his mind. She tells Lia and Sean that he used “to go into raptures, reciting the names.”

*“Someone pointed out to me that the names of flowers are interesting because they are one of the few things in the play you can actually name. The difficulty is in defining when a person dies, how a person dies, when love ends, what love is, how does one define a relationship between a son and a father? But the plants are things that can be named. And they are all around these people.” DeLillo*

**Love-Lies-Bleeding:** A species of red annual, exotic, flowering native plant. It goes by common names such as Pendant Amaranth, Tassel Flower, Velvet Flower, Foxtail Amaranth, and Quilete. Many parts of the plants, including the leaves and seeds, are edible, and are frequently used as a source of food in India and South America. This species, as with many other Amaranths, are originally from the American tropics. “Splendid, red, spiky flowers”, Lia tells us.

**Joshua Tree:** A tree native to south western North America, in the states of California, Arizona, Utah and Nevada. Confined mostly to the Mojave Desert they thrive in the open grasslands of Queen Valley and Lost Horse Valley in Joshua Tree National Park.

**Larkspur:** The common name of two closely related plant genera in the family Ranunculaceae. Ranunculaceae is a family of flowering plants also known as the Buttercup family or Crowfoot family.

**Fairy Duster:** A low, densely branched shrub 20 centimetres to 1.2 metres high. It is a member of the Pea Family which includes Acacias and Mimosas.

**Indian Paintbrush:** A family of about 200 species of annual and perennial herbaceous plants native to the west of the Americas, as well as northeast Asia. They are semi-parasitic on the roots of grasses.

**Navajo Tea:** An upright perennial that can be found in soils of the Edwards Plateau. The flower head consists of eight yellow ray flowers and numerous yellow disk flowers. Navajo Tea blooms from May to November.

**Paloverde:** A very strange looking shrub or small tree that grows in the Sonoran Desert of the south western United States and northern Mexico.

**Apache Plume:** This evergreen shrub is a member of the Rose Family and grows up to two metres high.

**The Night-blooming Cereus:** A member of the Cactus Family that resembles nothing more than a dead bush most of the year. It is rarely seen in the wild because of its inconspicuousness. But for one midsummer's night each year, its exquisitely scented flower opens as night falls, then closes forever with the first rays of the morning sun.

**Desert Mariposa:** A perennial herb and member of the lily family. It also produces one of the most spectacular flowers that can be seen in the desert. The flowers typically bloom for about one week in the late spring if rainfall has been sufficient.

**Sacred Datura:** A poisonous perennial weed and ornamental flower of south western North America. It is sometimes used as a hallucinogen.

**Scarlet Four-o'clock:** A spring wildflower found in the eastern Mojave Desert of the south western United States. The plant grows to half a metre with deep-red flowers which open at night. The plant can be found occasionally on washes, plains, and rocky slopes.

Before seeing the production, explore these questions:

For students who haven't read *Love-Lies-Bleeding*

1. An extract from *The Body Artist* by Don DeLillo for students to read to accustom them to DeLillo's writing style.

"She thought of these days as the first days back.

In the first days back she restocked the pantry and sprayed chemicals on the bathroom tiles. There was a full-sized pantry, a dark musty room off the kitchen, and it didn't need restocking. She cleaned and filled the bird feeders, shaping the day around a major thing with all its wrinkles and twists, its array of swarming variations. She sprayed the tiles and porcelain with pine-scent chemicals, half addicted to the fumes. There were two months left on the rental agreement. They'd rented for six and now there were two. One person, two months. She used a bottle with a pistol-grip attachment.

It felt like home, being here, and she raced through the days with their small ravishing routines, days the same, paced and organised but with a simultaneous wallow, uncentred, sometimes blank in places, days that moved so slow they ached.

She looked at the pages she's been working on with Rey, his bullshit autobiography. The hard copy sat there, stark against her sense of his spoken recollections, the tapestried lies and contrivances, stories shaped out of desperations not always clear to her. She hand-patted through the clothes he had left in the bedroom closet. She was not undone by the things that people leave behind when they die and she put the clothes in a box for the needy.

When she was downstairs she felt him in the rooms on the second floor. He used to prowl these rooms talking into a tiny tape recorder, smoke in his face, reciting ideas about some weary script to a writer somewhere whose name he could never recall. Now, he was the smoke, Rey was, the thing in the air, vaporous, drifting into every space sooner or later, unshaped, but with a face that was somehow part of the presence, specific to the prowling man.

She climbed the stairs, hearing the sound of a person makes who is climbing stairs, and she touched the oak grain of the newel when she reached the landing.

It was okay. She wanted to be here and she'd be okay. All their marriage, all the time they'd lived together they'd lived right here.

Her body felt different to her in ways she did not understand. Tight, framed, she didn't know exactly. Slightly foreign and unfamiliar. Different, thinner, didn't matter.

There was a package of bread crumbs on one of the shelves in the pantry. She knew she'd seen wax paper in a blue and something box. These were the things that were important now. Meals, tasks, errands.

She stepped slowly through the rooms. She felt him behind her when she was getting undressed, standing barefoot on the cold floor, throwing off a grubby sweater, and she half turned toward the bed.

In the first days back she got out of the car once and nearly collapsed – not the major breakdown of every significant function but a small helpless sinking towards the ground, a kind of forgetting how to stand.

She thought about broiling a cutlet, self-consciously alone, more or less seeing herself from the edge of the room or standing precisely where she was and seeing a smaller hovering her in the air somewhere, already thinking it's tomorrow.

She wanted to disappear in Rey's smoke, be dead, be him and she tore the wax paper along the serrated edge of the box and reached for the carton of bread crumbs...

She was always thinking into tomorrow. She planned the days in advance. She sat in the panelled room. She stood in the tub and sprayed high on the tile walls until the depraved pine reek of acid and ether began to overwhelm her. It was hard to stop pressing the trigger.

She burned her hand on the skillet and went right to the fridge and there was no ice i. She hadn't filled the ice thing...

She sat in the panelled room and tried to read. First she'd build a fire. It was a room designed aspiringly for a brandy and a fire, a failed room, perversely furnished, and she drank tea and tried to read a book. But she'd make her way through a page and stare indifferently at objects fixed in space.

In the first days back she ate a clam from hell and spent a number of subsequent hours scuttling to the toilet. But at least she had her body back.

She climbed the stairs, hearing herself from other parts of the house somehow.

She threw off a grubby sweater. She raised her arm out of the sweater and struck her hand lightly on something above, wondering what it was, although this had happened before, and then she remembered the hanging lamp, metal shade wobbling, the lamp that was totally wrong for the room, and she turned to the bed and looked, half looked, not looked in expectation but something else – a meaning so thin she could not read it.

There were too many things to understand and finally just one."

Compare Rey and his widow in <i>The Body Artist</i> to Alex and Toinette in <i>Love-Lies-Bleeding</i> .
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2. **Compare** the attitudes toward euthanasia, which literally means “a good death,” in the many and varied quotes that follow. It is the ultimate decision between life and death. Remember, the play does not take sides on this sensitive issue.

**“What is the modern meaning of life’s end? When does it end? How does it end? How should it end? What is the value of life? How do we measure it?” DeLillo asks. The idea of people not being resuscitated is commonplace today. How do they let him die with dignity?**

Martha Lavey, who played Toinette in the Chicago company, Steppenwolf Theater’s premiere production, believes that *Love-Lies Bleeding* interrogates a host of human concerns with a deep and personal caring and fearless dispassion.”

**Euthanasia** (from [Greek](#): εὐθανασία -eu, "good", θάνατος, thanatos, "death")

“a good death”? “an act of mercy”?

Darkling I listen; and, for many a time  
I have been half in love with easeful Death,  
Call'd him soft names in many a mused rhyme,  
To take into the air my quiet;  
Now more than ever seems it rich to die,  
To cease upon the midnight with no pain...  
- John Keats 1795-1821

It is not always easy to die, even when a person is mortally ill and desires a quick end. We have become so brainwashed by the fast, usually bloodless, and always painless deaths shown continually by the movie and television production industry that our collective perceptions of the act of death are sanitised. Whether by gunshot or through illness, the actor just rolls over and that’s the end. We want so much to believe that this is true that we don’t even question it. - Derek Humphry, ***Final Exit***

For doctors, understanding and figuring out how to respond to an individual patient’s perspective – continue to fight for life when chances of survival are slim, or acquiesce and try to make the best of whatever time remains? – can be almost as grave a responsibility as the more scientific challenge of treating the disease... What chance is there really of translating a patient’s hope for survival into the reality of a cure? One common thread in what they told me was interpreting a patient’s wishes are as much art as science.” - David Rieff, ***Illness as More Than Metaphor***

In this nation our end-of-life choices are so limited that pain and suffering are commonplace for many who deserve better. It need not be like this. We need not shun death, hoping that it will just go away. We need not force misery upon our sick and elderly in their last hours, days, weeks and years. New strategies to deal with this issue are vital and they are needed now. - Dr Philip Nitschke, ***Killing Me Softly: Voluntary Euthanasia and the Road to the Peaceful Pill***

According to Christian teaching...suffering, especially suffering during the last moments of life, has a special place in God’s saving plan; it is fact a sharing in Christ’s passion and a union with redeeming sacrifice which He offered in obedience to the Father’s will. - Pope John Paul II

The option of self-deliverance for the terminally ill person is the ultimate civil liberty. -Derek Humphry, ***Final Exit***

Is it a sin to rush into the secret house of death ere death dare come upon us? - Shakespeare

My Mother was determined to live no matter how terrible her suffering. Her choices had been stark from the outset...Nimer offered her the option of treatment with a drug called 5-azacitidine, which gave many MDS patients some months which they felt relatively well. But

the drug did little to prolong life. My Mother replied, with tremendous passion, "I am not interested in quality of life!"

- David Rieff, *Illness as More Than Metaphor*

I think it's a sad thing. I'm not a supporter of euthanasia... I'm a believer in palliative care and in properly funding it.

- Kim Beazley, Former Opposition Leader

I don't understand why these evangelists of their own belief systems have the right to take away another individual's right to end his or her suffering.

Letter to the Editor, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1997

As a priest and bishop for more than 40 years I have been privileged to live with people on their journeys through life and into death. I learned much in that process. I value, indeed, treasure life. I see it as a gift from God. I have no desire to hasten its end prematurely. At the same time I see no value in extending life beyond the limits of meaningful relationships. To me life is honoured when it can be laid down in an appropriate manner at the appropriate time. I defend the right of every individual to determine what that manner and time for are for him or her. I see no conflict between this and my religious convictions. - John Shelby Spong in *Killing Me Softly: Voluntary Euthanasia and the Road to the Peaceful Pill*

It seems almost impossible to develop a satisfactory definition of what is and is not medically futile. What is the cut off? A 10 percent chance of success? Five percent? One percent? When does the "very small chance" my mother's doctors brought at the "tremendous cost" in suffering... become so infinitesimal as to make it no longer worth trying? - David Rieff, *Illness as More Than Metaphor*

Before we go any farther, let me say this: If you consider the God whom you worship to be the absolute master of your fate, then read no more. Seek the best pain management available and arrange for hospice care. - Derek Humphry, *Final Exit*

In 2000, aged 83, Mum was hospitalised for four weeks. With her mind distorted by horrific morphine hallucinations and bedridden, incontinent and unable to read, she decided it was time to go. But, after saying her goodbyes she was furious to keep waking up in her tortured body, so she stopped eating and only sipped proffered drinks... Before she died, in brief moments of lucidity she reminded me, "you promised you'd help" I told her I wanted to keep that promise, but Mum was worried that I might suffer legal consequences. "Damm bureaucrats!" she muttered... the human rights of the living are enshrined by a United Nations charter, but what about the rights of the dying? - Bronley Norman in *Killing Me Softly: Voluntary Euthanasia and the Road to the Peaceful Pill*

I am not in favour of voluntary euthanasia nor of doctor assisted dying other than when doctors, with the informed consent of the patient or the patient's legal guardian, cease attempts to keep the patient alive when terminally ill. - Peter Garrett, Member for Kingsford Smith.

The thing that most upsets me is that the law says I can kill myself anytime I want to, but no one can be with me because they might have helped me. Well that's just rubbish and I don't see why I should die alone. I don't want to die alone. Surely people just sitting with me, people I love, my friends don't have to risk going to jail, just because they chose to be with me when I die. - Nancy Crick, in her last online diary entry

Whether or not a dying person should accelerate the end depends, of course, on the degree of unrelievable suffering involved, his or her conscience, and consideration of the feelings of others... All I ask of persons to whom any form of euthanasia is morally repugnant is tolerance and understanding of the feelings of other who want the right to choose what happens to their bodies in a free society. To every person their own way of death. - Derek Humphry, *Final Exit*

3. What would you include in the program for a play about euthanasia? Remember, the play does not have a specific response to this issue; it is non-judgmental on the subject. Rather it deals with what you carry forward in your life.

4. A portrait of actor Robyn Nevin taken in role as Toinette, dressed in austere black, against a cool blue horizon, seated in a well worn wooden outdoor chair, features on the poster and print advertisement for *Love-Lies-Bleeding*. Clip this ad from the Amusement Section of *The Sydney Morning Herald*. What can you tell about the play from this STC poster image of the play? What does this ad tell you about the marketing strategy for this production? What alternative images would you choose to represent the play?

5. Australian literary critic Barry Oakley recently said of DeLillo's latest novel, the post 9/11 story *Falling Man* that "Shock seems to have blown the story-lines apart. Instead of organic structure there's collage, cross-cutting back and forth in space and time." ("Review" in *Weekend Australian* June 30-July 1 2007) This post-modern device can also be seen in the structure of *Love-Lies-Bleeding*. Brainstorm other novel and film titles that share this technique.

## Activities for students who have read *Love-Lies-Bleeding*

1. **Playbuild** around the themes of: **Euthanasia** – Sean believes that the motionless Alex, having suffered a massive second stroke, is “showing meaningless body response. There’s no awareness, no consciousness. He’s not aware of you or me or anything else. He isn’t conscious. And he isn’t Alex. Eyes open. This means nothing. Eyes blinking. Means nothing. Hands moving. Nothing. He can’t think. He doesn’t know what you’re saying to him..... He is not Alex.”

Improvise around these themes:

- **fear of death**
- **family politics**
- **self-obsession and ego of artists** – Sean tells us in his eulogy for Alex: “He absorbed certain people, consumed and absorbed them. You know this. Those he didn’t consume he left standing in the street somewhere.”
- **artists’ relationship to the desert and the landscape**
- **“the complicated exchange between love and death that occurs among these characters.” DeLillo**
- **life, death, morality, love, hate, resentment, memory....**

2. What does the title *Love-Lies-Bleeding* tell you about the play? What is its effect as a metaphor? Is it ironic? (Love-Lies-Bleeding is a perennial plant called an amaranth, which contains spikes of crimson flowers. *Webster’s Dictionary* notes that amaranths are also known as imaginary flowers that never die.)

3. What expectations do you have for Don DeLillo’s play in production now you have read scenes from the play? What do you think of the play’s opening line: “I saw a dead man once,” (which was DeLillo’s inspiration) and his line in Act II, “I always wanted to kill a man.”

4. Read the following research on **Land Art** – the art form practised by Alex in *Love-Lies-Bleeding*. He has turned from painting to the creation of giant earthworks in the American Southwest. Alex tells us about it in Act Two – in flashback – that the room or sepulchre he has painted in a cave: “Site too remote. Access too difficult... Should the room be painted at all? I have my doubts. ...The paint’s a mistake. The paint is excess. A bare room inside a mountain. I trust what’s real. Rock. You can’t socialize it.”

“As long as you’re going to make a sculpture, why not make one that competes with a 747, or the Empire State Building, or the Golden Gate Bridge” - Michael Heizer

“I’m interested in making this work for later. I’m interested in making a work of art that will represent all civilization to this point.” - Michael Heizer

Land Art was a product of the 1960s, a reaction against the art market, a reaction against chalk, then eroding away. This seems an odd spark for revolution, but that’s what it turned out to be. American artists equated the Vietnam War with capitalism and capitalism with the art market. **What was needed was a new kind of work, one that couldn’t be sold in galleries: an art that was made of, well, volcanoes, say, or lightning. And so Land Art was born.**

Land Art’s mythology rests on the fact that Land Artists don’t like people. Michael Heizer, one of its fiercest exponents, has been making **a vast earthwork called City** somewhere in the Nevada desert for 35 years now. Heizer won’t say where City is. The idea of art big enough to be visible from the stratosphere, but so perversely remote as to be invisible from Earth, has filled me with a burning need to see it. So I



find myself driving west on Highway 60 to Quemado, New Mexico, in a Hertz 4WD bigger than my flat.

To call Quemado remote is to speak only the truth. Not remote enough for Walter De Maria, though, who built his Lightning Field on an abandoned ranch an unstated number of kilometres out of town in an unspecified direction. You are driven there by a leathery cowboy called, delightfully, Robert Weather. Robert has a handshake like a wrench, a laconic laugh and helped to build *The Lightning Field* back in 1977.

Part of The Lightning Field's point is that it takes a long time to get to and you have to spend a night there when you do. As De Maria pointed out, most people give Michelangelo's David 10 minutes. The Lightning Field gets 24 hours, and it deserves it.

The statistics alone are astonishing: 400 stainless steel rods, each six metres high, standing on a patch of desert a mile long by a half-mile wide. The rods' 67 metre spacings are correct to within 1/25th of an inch: if you lowered a vast pane of glass on to them, all their points would touch it exactly. The Lightning Field's log cabin holds six: the four of us here today settle on its stoop to watch the sun go down. The rods glow, turn black, become transparent, move about; the wind whispers through them, jackrabbits scuttle. There's no lightning, but then there rarely is and anyway De Maria says it isn't really part of the work. The Lightning Field is a wonder of potential.

This description bears a close resemblance to Alex's desert art in Act II, which De Lillo describes as "a bare room without a signature."

5. Outline in detail what you perceive the essential preparation for any of the actors in Don DeLillo's *Love-Lies-Bleeding* in their 5 week rehearsal period. The four characters continually evoke more mystery even as they reveal themselves.

## After seeing the production, explore these questions

### Post viewing questions for students who hadn't read the play

1. "DeLillo distributes various attitudes among his cast. A sharp social commentator can be heard." How does he use characterisation to represent different values and attitudes, particularly regarding euthanasia in *Love-Lies-Bleeding*?
2. What expectations did you have before seeing this production? What changed for you after seeing it? Some responders find the play too discursive, "lacking shape and a certain dynamism." As one character says, "We're just talking." Should DeLillo's characters be doing something other than talking?
3. Director Lee Lewis has said, "You can see the fascinations that DeLillo has – he is always writing about artists and their relationship to their work and the world." How does the playwright represent artists in *Love-Lies-Bleeding*?
4. *Direction* – What do you think was the vision of the director Lee Lewis and her interpretation of the play? (The role of the director of a theatrical production not only includes finding the best actors for the play, creating truthful and believable performances, and building an effective ensemble, but also defining a particular vision for the text.)
5. *Design* - What mood does Fiona Crombie's set evoke from the outset of the play? How does this alter at different times in the production? **Sketch** Crombie's set and list all the (minimal) props; e.g. chairs, dehydration stand and feeding tubes, manila folder and computer read-outs.

### Post viewing questions for students who had read the play

1. "In novels as diverse as his 1985 commercial breakthrough *White Noise*, to 1997's high-brow blockbuster *Underworld*, DeLillo has based much of his work on making us re-experience what we think we already know, in revealing the dark and the miraculous in the everyday." What insights does DeLillo reveal in *Love-Lies-Bleeding*?
2. **Discuss** the impact the character changes had on the audience's experience of the play. How did the actors use the space to convey the shifts in character and narrative and time? Did you find the play 'compelling...touching...sexy...exquisite.' like the critic from *The Chicago Sun-Times* about the Steppenwolf Company's production?
3. *Love-Lies-Bleeding* is really part of DeLillo's larger body of work. It is a lot more unwieldy than his other plays, structurally, because it is starting to reflect his novel writing structure (Postmodern) which has this great wandering epic form. What postmodern techniques can you detect in the play? (e.g. disjunctive time frame: Act I is set one year before the main action of the play, Scene 2 takes place in present time, Act II is set six years before the main action of the play and Act III at first takes place in present time, then moves to one year before the main action of the play, where the play commenced.)
4. A literary critic has said recently of DeLillo's latest novel *Falling Man*, "DeLillo develops this fraught family scenario with masterly skill, showing not only how traumatic events transform our most intimate relationships, but also putting them in a broader political context." How does this statement also apply to his play, *Love-Lies-Bleeding*?"

5. How does lighting contribute to the mood of the scenes? What effect do these lighting states achieve? List some that were used. (Here's a starter: lighting states include darkness, scant light, sunset etc Toinette – Act 2: "I bathe myself in the light of this epic desert space.")

How does music and other sound design contribute to the production? (e.g. the use of an amplified heartbeat, sounds of the desert etc)

## Bibliography

### PLAY TEXT

**LOVE-LIES-BLEEDING** – Scribner, New York 2006

**DON DELILLO'S OTHER PLAYS** – American novelist and playwright

*The Day Room*, Knopf, New York, 1987 – a black comedy set in a hospital's psychiatric wing

*Libra*, adapted by John Malkovich and produced as a play by Steppenwolf Theatre, Chicago, 1994 – about presidential assassin Lee Harvey Oswald.

*Valparaiso*, 1998 – about a man who flees a troubled marriage only to get trapped in a bizarre media circus. He steps onto a plane to go to a city in Indiana but winds up in Chile. The entire play consists of an interminable interview he undergoes as a result of this mistake."

**DeLillo:** "A novel is more unlimited (than a play) and doesn't necessarily have boundaries, though ultimately it is fairly fixed except in matters of interpretation. A play can change in terms of tone, appearance and meaning from one production to another, from one city and country to another even from one night to another. So you have much less control than with a novel.... But I think a playwright realises that after he finishes working on the script that this is only the beginning. What will happen when it moves into three dimensions: this is the test and the surprise."

**Re: De Lillo's novels:** His 14 novels to date are "blackly comic, humming with ideas, laced with aphorisms of doom but they still aspire. Now 70, De Lillo long ago realised the novelist's maxim, "only connect." (Tim Adams, "The Profile: Don De Lillo", in *Spectrum*, *The Sydney Morning Herald – Weekend Edition*, 9-10/6/07)

## FILMOGRAPHY

### Writer

Don De Lillo (writer) Michael Hoffman (dir.) **Game 6** U.S.A. 2005 – combining real and fictional events, centres around the historic 1986 World Series and a day in the life of a playwright who skips opening night to watch the momentous baseball game. Starring Michael Keaton, Robert Downey Jr.

Don De Lillo (writer) Keith Bogart (dir.) **The Rapture of the Athlete Assumed into Heaven** U.S.A. 2007 – short drama – A reporter interviews an athlete on the last day of his life

## Films dealing with euthanasia

Richard Attenborough (dir.) ***Shadowlands*** U.K. 1993 – about C.S. Lewis and his terminally ill wife, poet Joy Gresham – starring Anthony Hopkins & Debra Winger

Jon Badham (dir.) ***Whose Life is it Anyway?*** U.S.A. 1982 Ken Harrison is an artist who makes sculptures. One day he is involved in a car accident, and is paralyzed from his neck. Starring Richard Dreyfuss

Richard Eyre (dir.) ***Iris*** U.K. 2001 - True story of the lifelong romance between novelist Iris Murdoch and her husband John Bayley, from their student days through her battle with Alzheimer's disease. Starring Judi Dench, Jim Broadbent & Kate Winslet

Clint Eastwood, (dir.) ***Million Dollar Baby***, U.S.A. 2004 - Frankie Dunn has trained and managed some incredible fighters during a lifetime spent in the ring. The most important lesson he teaches his boxers is the one that rules life: above all, always protect yourself. In the wake of a painful estrangement from his daughter, Frankie has been unwilling to let himself get close to anyone for a very long time. His only friend, Scrap, an ex-boxer who looks after Frankie's gym, knows that beneath his gruff exterior is a man who has been seeking, for the past 25 years, the forgiveness that somehow continues to elude him. Then Maggie Fitzgerald walks into his gym... Starring Hilary Swank, Clint Eastwood & Morgan Freeman

Nick Cassavetes (dir.), ***The Notebook***, U.S.A. 2004 - focuses on an old man reading a story to an old woman in a nursing home. Starring Ryan Gosling & Gena Rowlands

Alejandro Amenabar (dir.), ***The Sea Inside***, Mexico 2004 - Life story of Spaniard Ramón Sampedro, who fought a 30-year campaign to win the right to end his life with dignity. Film explores Ramón's relationships with two women: Julia, a lawyer who supports his cause, and Rosa, a local woman who wants to convince him that life is worth living. Through the gift of his love, these two women are inspired to accomplish things they never previously thought possible. Despite his wish to die, Ramón taught everyone he encountered the meaning, value and preciousness of life. Though he could not move himself, he had an uncanny ability to move others. Starring Javier Bardem

Michael Anderson (dir.), ***Logan's Run*** U.K. 1976 - An idyllic sci-fi future has one major drawback: life must end at 30.... Starring Michael York

Matthew Ryan Hoge (dir.), ***The United States of Leland***, U.S.A. 2003 - Soft-spoken 16-year old Leland Fitzgerald (Ryan Gosling) commits a seemingly senseless murder that shocks his community, affecting both his victim's family and his own. Arrested and imprisoned in a juvenile detention facility, Leland comes in contact with an aspiring writer and prison teacher, Pearl Madison (Don Cheadle). As Pearl delves into the mystery of Leland's crime, he also sees the chance for a career-making book as the boy's estranged father is the world-renowned author, Albert Fitzgerald (Kevin Spacey).

## WEB SITES

[www.sydneytheatre.com.au/education](http://www.sydneytheatre.com.au/education) - Sydney Theatre Company

You can also send us your feedback on the productions you have seen, e-mail our archivist for specific information you may be searching for or check the date and time of a performance.

[www.steppenwolf.org/news/detail](http://www.steppenwolf.org/news/detail) - *Love-Lies-Bleeding* – premiere production

[www.newcitychicago.com/chicago/5325.html](http://www.newcitychicago.com/chicago/5325.html) - DeLillo discusses *Love-Lies-Bleeding*

<<<http://blog.steppenwolf.org>>> - Archive of *Love-Lies-Bleeding*

<http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi> - De Lillo talks about writing plays and defining love and death

[www.perival.com/delillo/lovelies.html](http://www.perival.com/delillo/lovelies.html) - American media watch on *Love-Lies-Bleeding* – includes a short MP3 audio clip of DeLillo explaining the genesis of the play.

[www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/06/19](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/06/19) - Peter Marks, staff writer on *Love-Lies-Bleeding: "Dying to Make a Point"* review of the Steppenwolf Theatre's production at the Kennedy Center, Washington DC.

[www.kennedy-center.org/calendar/index/](http://www.kennedy-center.org/calendar/index/) - *Love-Lies-Bleeding* – “a metaphor for love and death, wonder and waiting, blessing and breath.”

## Scenes from *Love-Lies-Bleeding*

### Act I Scene 1, p. p.4-6

Alex tells Lia of a childhood memory of seeing a dead man on the subway.

#### Scene 1

Alex and Lia, one year before the main action of the play.

He is haggard, after a stroke. seated in a wheelchair, stage right, isolated from the room set, which is in near darkness. His speech is laboured. Lia sits in close proximity, a food bowl within reach. Across the stage, in scant light, barely visible, there is the sitting figure of a man.

ALEX            I saw a dead man on the subway once. I was ten or eleven, riding with my father, The man was in a corner seat, across the aisle. Only a few people in the car. A dead man sits there. This is the subway. You don't know about this. Nobody looks at anybody else. He sits there, and I'm the only one that sees him. I see him so clearly now I could almost tell you things about his life. My father was reading the newspaper. He liked to follow the horses. He analysed the charts. He studied the race results. There weren't too many things he followed, my father, Horse races and prizefights. There was a column he always read. If I thought about it long enough, I could tell you the columnist's name.

LIA            And the man. Across the aisle.

ALEX            Nobody paid him the slightest mind. Another sleeping rider, by their dim lights. I watched him steadily. I examined him. I was fixated. I'm thinking how he sat. He sat against the bulkhead, partly, at the end of the car. When the train rocked, he got bounced around a little and I thought he might topple to the floor. Hi mouth was open. His face, I swear, it was gray. There wasn't any question in my mind. Dead. All life drained out of him. But in a way I can't explain, it didn't seem strange or forbidding. It seemed forbidding but not in a way tat threatened me personally.

I accepted what I saw. A rider on the train, going breakneck through the tunnel. It scared me to think he might topple to the floor. That was forbidding. He could have been riding all day. Gray like an animal. He belonged to a different order of nature. The first dead man I'd ever seen and there's never been anyone since who has looked more finally and absolutely dead.

LIA            And your father. What did he do? Did he alert someone when the train reached the next station?

ALEX            I don't know. I don't know if I told him. The memory ends here. I draw a total blank. This is the subway. He's reading the sports pages. The colum he's reading is part boldface, part regular type, and I can see the face of the columnist in the little photo set into the type. He has a slick mustache. A racetrack mustache.

LIA            Can you tell me his name?

ALEX            Hi name will come to me in a minute.

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Act 2, Scene 1 p.p. 52-55 Alex and Toinette in flashback

Alex and Toinette, six years before the main action of the play. Alex is in vigorous health. Toinette travel-weary. The room is open to the late-afternoon light, a sense of bright sky, deep distances. There is a tray with water glasses, wine goblets, bottles. He is studying her.

TOINETTE                    Tell me what you're looking at.

ALEX                         Another lifetime.

TOINETTE                    Sounds like my day. Began so long ago I was wearing pigtails.

ALEX                         I'm looking at eleven years. That's how long we lasted, isn't it? Long time. Or not so long. Seemed long, didn't it?

TOINETTE                    Three airports, two airplanes, one piteous little car. You didn't tell me to get four-wheel drive. Half of me is still in the car. I had no idea you were so far from anything.

ALEX                         What's anything? I have friends who visit. Serious people. They think I'm here to find peace of mind. The age-old idiot whimsy.

TOINETTE                    I know why you're here.

ALEX                         I'm just here. In winter the sharp-shinned hawk comes down to the scrub. I can sit and watch a hawk in a tree for unnumbered hours. I'm on his time. He don't move, I don't move. I drive out to the site and stay four, five days at a time. Work and sweat. Talk Spanish to my crew.

TOINETTE                    I want to see what you are doing.

ALEX                         We're moving rock. I drink water all day. Sweat and piss. Nothing in my head but what's in plain view.

TOINETTE                    You're making it sound simpler than it is.

ALEX                         I make things sound simpler than they are. That's what I do. The hawk hits a cactus wren and the little bird explodes.

TOINETTE                    I want to see the work.

ALEX                         No, you don't.

TOINETTE                    Then why did I come here?

ALEX                         To see me. The way I wanted to see you. Isn't it the most natural thing, a man and a woman getting back in touch? Don't you feel the erotic rumblings?

TOINETTE                    I wasn't surprised to hear from you. Which is odd, considering how long it's been. But I didn't expect to hear that you're alone.

ALEX                         Being alone is my punishment.

TOINETTE                    For what?

ALEX                         For everything. For this. For wanting exactly this.

TOINETTE                    And then failing at it. Because be assured. It's only a matter of time.

ALEX                                Before what.

TOINETTE                        You get married again.

ALEX                                Is that right?

TOINETTE                        How long am I staying?

ALEX                                I don't know. Not long.

TOINETTE                        I think we have two days of mutually assured tolerance. Three at most.

### **Act 3 Scene 3, pp. 77-81. Sean's Monologue**

**Sean and the sitting figure of Alex, head raised, eyes open. Bottle of morphine one-quarter diminished.**

**SEAN**                                I know it isn't rue, what Lia says. She says that you can hear us. You can feel and think. You react, you're aware. I don't believe it. But even if I thought you could hear me, what would I say to you? I don't think I know what to say. I never did. I know what you would say if you could speak, if you chose to speak freely, in the spirit of little miracles. You would say, Not everything we feel has to be expressed, or can be expressed. We withhold some things. Some things are too powerful, we whisper. We're free to do this, you would say. We whisper to our lovers. Why? Because some things are too precious to enter the world. Because too much can be said. Because love can't bear all this saying, But what about the son who sits in the room with his father? What happens then? I don't know. It was never clear to me who I was supposed to be in your presence. You were fixed forever within yourself. I was outside somewhere, watching us both. Not that I don't understand. I understand. Being a father had nothing to do with you. Having a child. It was an encroachment of the worst sort. It violated your seclusion, your private turmoil. It made you visible to yourself. I was proud of you. Did you know that? Proud to be the son of an artist. The cold-blooded bastard is a painter in a studio. One day, I'm twelve years old, standing in a corner to watch you work. Acrylic on masonite. Hearing those fantastic words. Painting made sense to me, abstract painting. It was acrylic on masonite. And cold black coffee in a paper cup. I drank some of your coffee and nearly fell down dead.



## Reviews

### Grasping for truth in the face of death

Saturday, 14 July 2007, Sydney Morning Herald, Page: 21

THEATRE: LOVE LIES BLEEDING

Sydney Theatre Company Wharf 1, July 12 Until September 2 Reviewed by Bryce Hallett

DON DeLILLO'S meditation on life and death takes its name from the love-lies-bleeding plant which is festooned with brilliant crimson flowers dangling in tassels.

Rich in vitamins and minerals the bush is a potent balm for people enduring great stress or physical pain. It is one of several plants mentioned in the play, including the larkspur and the Joshua tree, and each serves as a metaphor for a spectacular, vigorous life and a species able to thrive in the most precarious and unlikely of places.

*Love Lies Bleeding* centres on the once robust, independent artist Alex Macklin (Max Cullen), who is nearing death, and the three people who love him the most but have different views on how and when he should die.

His former wife, Toinette (Robyn Nevin), and his son, Sean (Benjamin Winspear), want his suffering to stop. They have no desire to witness a long, excruciating death, but Alex's young wife, Lia (Paula Arundell), wants to allow him a natural death despite his vegetative state.

The moral conundrum is hardly new and DeLillo's circling of the subject of euthanasia and a minefield of legal and medical arguments has been better illuminated in journalistic accounts as well as the writings of David Rieff and Dr Philip Nitschke. But the tough, unsentimental drama is less about euthanasia than it is about perception, loyalty and love. The dysfunctional or disenchanted characters grasp for truths about a man/artist deep in their thoughts yet unreachable and ready to fade.

The director, Lee Lewis, has crafted an astringent and uneasy production. Designer Fiona Crombie's bare-bones desert set and Luiz Pampolha's lighting produces a startling glare and an overall alienating effect. Lewis accentuates the domestic drama's elemental forces as though it were a Greek tragedy.

Nevin is in fine form as the crisp, sardonic and stitched-up Toinette. She assumes to know Alex better than most and clings to her memories of secluded, hard-bitten times they once shared. Winspear is very good as the conflicted son whose feelings of abandonment cloud his motives and judgment while Arundell is terrific as the earthy, open-hearted Lia. Unfortunately the part is underwritten and poorly developed.

Her change of heart pushes complexity and conflict to one side. For a production that strives to be authentic there are several false notes, not least wavering accents and the miscasting of Max Cullen, who fails to bring the dying Alex persuasively or eloquently alive. By the time he made his final exit I didn't much care for anyone, except perhaps the alarmingly lifeless Alex "in extremis", played by Shaun Goss, but at least *Love Lies Bleeding* makes you think about what is left to cherish in the end.

## Desert setting suits sparse, arid drama

Sunday, 15 July 2007, *Sunday Telegraph*, Page: 104

LOVE-LIES-BLEEDING Sydney Theatre Company, Wharf 1, until September 2. In the harsh glare of the desert sun, a frail man sits motionless in a chair, hooked up to an intravenous drip.

Whether he is conscious of anything at all only he knows, but his mind appears to be as inert as his body. Seventy-year-old Alex (Max Cullen) was an individualistic, somewhat self-absorbed artist until a second stroke left him in "a persistent vegetative state".

For seven months his younger fourth wife, Lia (Paula Arundell), has been caring for him and looking for life in his open, unseeing eyes.

But now Alex's second wife, Toinette (Robyn Nevin), and estranged son Sean (Benjamin Winspear) from his first marriage have arrived, determined to help him die with dignity. Lia, on the other hand, wants to let nature take its course and allow Alex to die in his own time.

Written by acclaimed American novelist Don DeLillo, *Love-Lies-Bleeding* is a sparse, cerebral play. Circling the issue of euthanasia, it raises all kinds of questions about life and death. When does someone cease to exist? What value do we put on life? Does anyone have the right to decide how and when someone dies? Is any kind of life better than none? In a hastened death, whose merciful release is it the victim's or the carer's? The 80-minute drama jumps back and forth in time in cinematic fashion with flashbacks to scenes when Alex was in vigorous health, as well as wheelchair-bound but mentally alert after his first stroke, and forward to his memorial. Throughout it all, the comatose Alex (Shaun Goss) sits in his chair, a silent but oblivious witness to the debate.

*Love-Lies-Bleeding* is intellectually engaging but less so dramatically and emotionally. At times it's as arid as the desert setting. The characters feel underwritten and hard to empathise with, and there's little of the passion you would expect for such an emotive subject.

Director Lee Lewis and her strong cast go a long way towards overcoming the script's shortcomings. The play is set in the American south-west and Fiona Crombie has designed a wonderfully sparse sandy desert set that matches the distilled language. Composer Paul Charlier's use of sustained notes and minimal repetition creates a tense, edgy atmosphere.

Appearing in her final role for Sydney Theatre Company before she steps down as artistic director, Nevin is outstandingly good as Toinette, a New York publisher. She looks incredibly chic and perfectly captures the rhythms of DeLillo's elegant writing, delivering the lines with panache and plenty of dark humour.

Arch and cynical at first, she takes us on an emotional journey as Toinette begins to have doubts about what she and Sean are doing.

Arundell gives a lovely warm, compassionate performance as Lia. Cullen brings his trademark shambolic charm to Alex though he mumbles at times and his accent wanders freely. Winspear does well in the thankless role of the unlikeable, bitter Sean, who clinically sets about hastening his father's death. As Alex "in extremis", Goss is so motionless that he could almost be a waxwork quite a feat for such an extended time.

Despite their best efforts, the play remains a dispassionate debate, lacking any genuine dramatic conflict. Beautifully staged by Lewis, it's a fine production of a flawed play.

## Mission of love

Monday, 16 July 2007, *Daily Telegraph*, Page: 71

### *Love-Lies-Bleeding* Sydney Theatre Company Review

Artist Alex Macklin has had two strokes and sits in a persistent vegetative state. His ex-wife Toinette and their son Sean arrive at his desert home on a mission to end his suffering. His current wife, Lia, feels he is not ready to die.

These opposing forces throw up the questions and moral dilemmas that surround every act of euthanasia (or "good death"), which continue to be debated at the highest levels.

Director Lee Lewis, in her mainstage debut for Sydney Theatre Company, has fashioned a compelling production.

Buoyed by a strong cast in which STC artistic director Robyn Nevin excels, Lewis allows the full weight, and often poetic sensibilities, of Don DeLillo's language to take centre stage.

The American playwright, perhaps better known for his novels, including *Underworld* and *White Noise*, appears to take no sides in the arguments and -reasonings over the plight of Alex instead forming a balanced and evolving picture of how such foreboding decisions are made.

Nevin loved the play as soon as she read it following its premiere with the Steppenwolf Theatre Company in Chicago last year. It's not hard to see why because not only does the writing cut sublimely to the heart of the matter, it offers Nevin a role that could almost have been written for her.

Toinette, Alex's second wife (Lia is his fourth), is a disillusioned children's books editor, whose surface cynicism and fondness for a drink masks an underlying sentimentality.

Nevin, back on stage for the first time in more than two years, plays the role with relish, juggling Toinette's steely resolve with an appealing vulnerability.

As Alex's current wife and carer, Lia, a quiet but determined presence who believes suffering is just another part of life, Paula Arundell gives a moving performance, particularly when, at the memorial service, she refuses to divulge the most blessed, private stories from her life with Alex.

Max Cullen fits neatly into the role of Alex, a lifelong artist who loves desert plants and their names, of which *Love-Lies- Bleeding* is one.

Benjamin Winspear's a solid presence as the geophysicist son, convinced his father is not alive in the real sense because there's no "heat and motion".

Fiona Crombie's set is a desert expanse that merges into Alex's lounge room, enhanced by Luiz Pampolha's evocative lighting, which is often stark like the white heat of the desert. Paul Charlier's almost subliminal soundscape hints at foreboding.

Although the subject matter may not be entirely original the 1910s play *Whose Life Is It Anyway?* reflected on similar issues, this remains a startlingly effective and superbly performed production.

Wharf 1, Walsh Bay. Until Sept2, \$54-\$73, 9250 1777, [sydneytheatre.com.au](http://sydneytheatre.com.au) GARY SMITH