

The Silence: A Novel by Don DeLillo

Sometimes I find a lauded book quite disappointing, and while I usually review only books I've liked and hope you will like too, here are a few I think you might just as well avoid. Only in my opinion, of course.

The Silence: A Novel, Don DeLillo (2020, Scribner)

Written shortly before the pandemic, this book's scenario of a sudden loss of all electric power and communication media in New York City has been hailed as eerily foreseeing our isolation in fighting Covid. That's scarcely a reason to like it, though. And it isn't a novel: it's a short story gussied up in imitation typewriter-font and triple-spaced in small format to stretch it to 116 pages.

But is it a good short story?

It concerns five people: Max, a man who is frustrated because the outage prevents him from watching the Super Bowl, his wife, a philosophy professor, and her former student, a high school teacher who has come to watch the game, and a couple also invited for the occasion, whose airplane, returning them from France, has barely managed to crash-land as the power outage begins. In their relief, the invited couple have sex, twice (scant description), and the wife and ex-student think about having sex, but don't. Everybody except Max has Thoughts and the two philosophers engage in Wisdom, especially concerning Einstein and relativity. Max imagines and voices a broadcaster reporting on the invisible game. Then he falls silent. Some of this is amusing, I admit. But some of it is just pretentious.