

Reed Theatre: A Year in Review

By Melanie LeDrew

Since the dark ages of COVID, the landscape of Reed's Theatre is better and bolder than ever. Last year's season kicked off with a bang with *Mr. Burns a Post-Electric Play* (2012), written by Reed's very own Anne Washburn '91 and with music by Michael Friedman. *Mr. Burns*, a one-act play and two-act musical, was directed by Professor Catherine Duffly. The post-apocalyptic setting mixed with themes of collective memory explored through the iconic Simpsons TV show was a rousing success, boasting packed audiences

each night.

Between rehearsals for *Mr. Burns*, Professor Kate Bredeson's Directing class held open auditions for low-commitment scenes directed by students partaking in the class. The directors' chosen scenes were showcased, earning students valuable experience in the directing field, and were a great way for students to get involved in theatre without a huge time commitment.

In the Spring, Sizheng Song's ('23) *Antigona Furiosa* (1985-86) kicked off the season of senior thesis shows. Song implemented spectacular puppetry and artistry in Griselda Gambaro's Argentinian drama

influenced by the Athenian tragedy by Sophocles.

The next thesis show was Ian Silverman's ('23) VR *The Little Prince*, which used VR technology to create the outer-space environment of the show.

The third production was put on by Aaron Berlau ('23) and Anna Hendrickson ('23): *The Wild Boar of Chernobyl* (2018) written by Francesca Pazniokas. *Wild Boar* was a thrilling cult horror, with an eerie atmosphere created by the spectacular use of lighting, space, and intense

performances.

And last of the thesis shows was Will Stevens' ('23) Frankensteinian version of *Blue Heart* (1997), written by Caryl Churchill. *Blue Heart's* actors made spectacular use of the linguistic disease present in the script, making the show a ket-ket-kettle time.

Then there was the Playwriting class showcase, another class taught by Prof. Kate Bredeson, in which students got the chance to hear their work read by their choice of volunteer actors. The showcase provided playwrights with the opportunity to understand how their plays could be performed, and was another oppor-

tunity for students to get involved in low-commitment theatre at Reed.

Topping off the season was the spring main-stage show, *The Last Croissant* (2013) written by Veronica Tijoe and directed by visiting Professor Barbie Wu, the newest addition to the department. *The Last Croissant* was a wildly whimsical show with wonderful acting and tech. Students even got to work with Veronica Tijoe themselves, and they brought excellent insight to the production of the show.

With all that said, stay tuned to the events page on the productions coming this year to Reed!

Silo Review: The Flamekeepers

By Declan Bradley

In a particularly haunting scene of the Apple TV+ series *Silo*, a military interrogator makes his prisoner an offer. If she fails to cooperate, he'll lock her in a windowless concrete cell several miles beneath the Earth's surface, never to see the sun again. If she gives up the names of her allies, he'll do the exact same thing — but he'll keep her plied with a steady supply of painkillers. That way, she can let her remaining years slip away, lost in hallucinations of beachside sunsets she can never see with her own eyes. Because in the Silo, only in dreams can you ever be truly free.

Much has been written about *Silo* since it became a surprise hit late last year. *The Verge* called it "a small town mystery set at the end of the world." *The New York Times*, "a cautionary tale about tech." And it is all of those things and more. But it is also, in its bones, a horror story — one made all the more frightening by its lack of traditional jump scares or raging monsters. The show is frightening not because it's shocking, but because it's addictive — melding the sinewy grace of a whodunnit with the creeping sense of inevitable doom familiar to readers of Shakespeare or Homer.

Silo's is a world initially light on both details and explanation — as many characters will be eager to tell you throughout the series' premiere: "We do not know why we are here. We do not know who built the Silo." All they do know is that the hundred story concrete habitat they call home serves to protect them from the dangers of the outside world. The "windows" of the

Silo, no matter where in the building they're found, all look out on the same view — a short stretch of blasted, poisoned ground culminating in a single dead tree at the top of a small hill. The perfectly preserved bodies of "cleaners" — political dissidents who made the fatal mistake of expressing a desire to leave the Silo — litter the hillside, their corpses left as a warning to future generations.



Dissident "cleaners" are exiled from the safety of the Silo with only a few minutes of oxygen in their suits and a single piece of wool with which to clean the habitat's exterior camera.

Yet for some residents of the Silo, that warning has never been enough to suppress a hunger for answers. Allison Becker (Rashida Jones), is a systems programmer and master hacker, one who harbors a growing suspicion that the Silo's "population control program" of enforced sterilization is not the beneficent system she has always been told. Meanwhile, her husband, Sheriff Holston Becker (David Oyelowo), makes his living confiscating dangerous "relics" that pose a threat to order in the Silo, including, at one point, what appears to be a pez dispenser.

As questions pile up for the Beckers and for Mayor Jahn's, ef-

factive ruler of the Silo, some of them begin to question whether their self-contained world is really the safe haven it seems. Their search for answers will take them into the heart of the bizarre but undeniably enticing world of the Silo, a world where the retrofuturistic aesthetic of *Loki* or *Brazil* becomes tinged with the gritty dystopian cynicism of *Snowpiercer* or *Blade Runner*.



Systems programmer Allison (Rashida Jones) searches for answers to the mysteries of her futuristic world from behind the screen of a bizarrely anachronistic Unix terminal.

By the time Rebecca Ferguson's protagonist Juliette Nichols makes her first appearance in episode three, most of these people will be dead. And therein lies what makes *Silo* such a remarkable piece of storytelling. It is not a story about people. It is a story about what consumes people. Whether it be love, or grief, or simply the aching desire to know, most of the series' characters are driven, inexorably, to fight the irresistible, to strive for the impossible, to reach for the sun and burn themselves up trying.

In some ways that trope — the indomitable truth seeker who refuses to give up in the face of impossible odds, the one person

who sees clearly in a world of lies — has been far overused in genre fiction. It should not be innovative. It should not feel new. And yet, in *Silo*, it does.

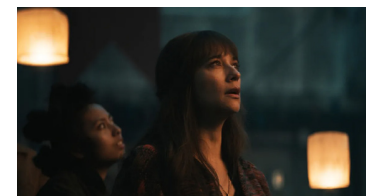


Juliette (Rebecca Ferguson) and George (Ferdinand Kingsley) long for a sky they'll never see.

Partially, I think, that's because the series takes a cue from Philip K. Dick in its understanding that there is a very fine line between insight and madness. It's all well and good to cheer for characters who doubt reality in fiction — in fact, Hollywood has a long tradition of it — but in the real world, when someone says, "everything you know is a lie and the shadow government is out to get me," it's usually a sign that they need to seek help from a mental health professional. The fact that, in this particular case, the characters of *Silo* happen to be right is mostly a coincidence.

That's what makes *Silo* so darkly thrilling to watch. At some level, you know that the Silo is not such a terrible place to live. Sure, it's all a lie — the government is watching you and the whole thing is probably some kind of eugenics experiment — but as the cant of the Silo intones: "We only know that here is safe, and there is not." Generations of

citizens have probably felt at least some suspicion that their history, the story of themselves, was a lie — yet they chose to live that lie, to laugh and cry and fall in love in an unreal world, rather than risk their lives for a truth that offered no guarantees of a better future. Yet, in every world, there are those that keep the flame. Those who, for better or worse, cannot tolerate a lie — even if it means facing great personal danger. The ones who walk away from Ome-las.



In every world, there are those that keep the flame.

Silo is the story of those people. The ones who were told to accept life as it was given to them and screamed no. I want to go out. The ones who died for the truth, and for each other, without ever reaching their goal. So I say that while *Silo* is a cautionary tale, it's not about big tech. It's a warning about the terrible banality of lies, about the seductive quality of any simple narrative of good and evil, safe and unsafe — especially the ones peddled by those with the trappings of authority.

Silo is a reminder that none of us want to live in a world where we rely on the mad to speak the truth. For all of our sakes, I hope we take that warning seriously.

O(pabinia) Week

By Alton Krueger

Transport yourself back 505 million years ago to the middle Cambrian. The earth is unrecognizable. The continents we know today have not yet formed, and the greenery we associate with life has not yet evolved. The land is barren and rocky. The oceans, however, are brimming with life, and it is some of the most diverse you've ever seen. There are countless strange arthropods, some spikey, appendaged, or covered in armor, but among them, one is sure to stand out: *Opabinia regalis* — the ceaselessly mocked and pondered five-eyed wonder of the Cambrian.

Seemingly drawn to life from the sketchbook of an imaginative 6th grader, *Opabinia* is of an undeniably unusual form. It has five protruding compound eyes, a body lined with flower-petal-like appendages, and a clawed proboscis. *Opabinia* used its flowery appendages to swim slowly across the sea floor in a flapping movement, and steered using its upright angled tailfins. While hunting for prey it used its proboscis to seize its food and then scooped it into its mouth. Still, *Opabinia* lacked any form of jaws (Whittington, 1975), so although it

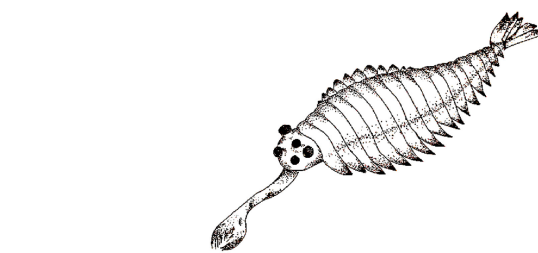
may have been able to fetch underwater pringles, it could not have had any itself. Instead, it is likely *Opabinia* fed on soft prey like worms.

Because of its unique beauty, *Opabinia* defied the limiting taxonomic classifications of the time. First discovered in 1911 by Charles Doolittle Walcott in the Burgess shale (a prolific fossil site known for its detail of Cambrian life), *Opabinia* was thought of as a crustacean. Later, it went under consideration for the rank of arthropod but was turned down due to its lack of jointed legs. It was also tried as a worm, and very shortly as a trilobite, but nothing was sticking. This is cruelly reinforced by the website for the University of California Berkeley Museum of Paleontology. The site displays a little low-res *Opabinia* you are supposed to click so it can be added to the tree of life, but when you do so, it drifts erratically, until it settles into a separate branch accompanied by a question mark and fades to gray. Eventually, *Opabinia* found its way back into the arthropod crowd, but only as part of a stem group, entering the family of *Opabiniidae* where it once stood alone. Not that it needs any other organisms, because even though it composed only

0.006% of the fossils in its community (Royal Ontario Museum, n.d.), *Opabinia* is more than enough.

Sometimes, however, this world isn't ready for a fellow with a clawed proboscis. When *Opabinia* was first shown at an Oxford paleontological meeting it was greeted with laughter. But *Opabinia* did nothing to deserve this mockery, if anything we are better for *Opabinia's* perceived oddity as it allows us to see a form of life most of us could not imagine if we tried. And yes, it did swim "feebly" (Whittington, 1975), but maybe it's okay to swim a little slower and take life a little easier — we'll all end up in our own Burgess shale one day, why not appreciate the sea floor while we can. And maybe *Opabinia* didn't just need its five mushroom-like eyes to look out for predators, but also haters, and shouldn't we be doing the same?

Despite all odds, *Opabinia* is no longer alone. A new family member of the *Opabiniidae* was classified in 2022: *Utaurora comosa*. Despite a few minor differences, including four more pairs of tail blades, *Utaurora* is an obvious match. The recent inclusion of additional *Opabiniidae* challenges long-standing views that *Opabinia* was



a lonely weirdo, instead, *Opabinia* is now a weirdo with a pal. Once again illustrating the age-old lesson that no matter how many paleontologists laugh at us, we can still find like-minded company.

It is an endless tragedy that *Opabinia* is still shrouded in relative obscurity because the mind boggles at all this creature could teach us. After all, aren't we all tiny, bottom-dwelling, uncategorizable, creatures swimming through the sea of knowledge plucking with our limited-range proboscis, just trying to grab onto something real? And sure, maybe we are limited to the soft foods of what our mortal minds can comprehend. But that didn't stop *Opabinia*. It kept (until its extinction) flapping, its lateral lobes and catching those worms, and so should we.

Because I am as of yet unaware of one, to conclude this ode to *Opabinia*, I have written a brief eulogy for our finned friend:

Rest easy, *Opabinia*. Taken too soon.

You were one of my favorite Permian critters (and my favorite with a proboscis).

You would have loved Jamba juice and the Tully monster.

With your utter disregard for evolutionary norms, you inspire me, and countless paleontologists.

Though you were less than 3 inches long, your influence is immeasurable.

Cheers to you, *Opabinia*.