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**The Shadow Whose Prey the Hunter Becomes**

**Audience & Media Feedback**

**SELECTED MEDIA REVIEWS**

Soon we discover that the meeting has been called for the purpose not of justifying the neurodiverse but of warning the rest of us about a future in which the technology we’ve created will one day, like the shadow of the title, render everyone inferior — disabled, in fact.

“You will struggle to be understood,” Laherty informs us. “Others will want to highlight your limits.”

Whether or not you accept that dystopian premise, its sideways development is astonishingly artful… it is artful in a way specific to the cognitive profiles of the actors involved, who also co-wrote the script with other members of the company. (The director is Bruce Gladwin.) If it moves in unfamiliar ways and is delivered through unfamiliar means, that is a sign that it is delivering new information. Which is what we must keep asking the theater to do…. How exciting to find that because we are all neurodiverse there are bound to be many others.

**Jesse Green for New York Times**

**Full Review:** [**https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/13/theater/under-the-radar-festival-neurodiversity.html?searchResultPosition=1#commentsContainer**](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/13/theater/under-the-radar-festival-neurodiversity.html?searchResultPosition=1#commentsContainer)

It’s very likely that you’ve never before had a theatrical experience quite like “The Shadow Whose Prey the Hunter Becomes.’’ I certainly hadn’t…. Into its one remarkable hour “Shadow’’ manages to pack more insight, wisdom, emotional resonance, and steadily accumulating power than many stage productions achieve in three times that duration... “Shadow’’ leaves its audience with something to ponder.

**Don Aucoin for The Boston Globe Review**

**Full Review: https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/01/24/arts/shadow-artsemerson-revelations-struggle-be-understood/**

This review of *The Shadow Whose Prey the Hunter Becomes*won’t take up too much space—not because it doesn’t deserve copious column inches but because it’s a piece of unexpectedly brilliant theater about which giving too much away would undermine its maximum effect. And don’t let the initially pretentious-sounding title put you off. By the time the 65-minute Under the Radar import from Australia finishes, its meaning is all too clear and gorgeously pertinent and pungent… Saying anything more detailed than artificial intelligence and its eventual widespread ramifications is a strong focus risks giving away the solar-plexus wallop that *The Shadow Whose Prey the Hunter Becomes*delivers. So no more will be said, other than *TSWPTHB*is an indisputable must-see.

**David Finkle for New York Stage Review**

**5 stars**

**Full Review:** [**http://nystagereview.com/2020/01/12/the-shadow-whose-prey-the-hunter-becomes-becomes-luminescent/**](http://nystagereview.com/2020/01/12/the-shadow-whose-prey-the-hunter-becomes-becomes-luminescent/)

Victorian company Back to Back Theatre continues its long run of provoking yet humorous works of contemporary performance generated by and featuring its long-serving ensemble members…

So begins a freewheeling performance-cum-debate woven from a series of improvisations by the cast, shaped by director Bruce Gladwin into a captivating 70-minutes underpinned by an ambient jazz soundtrack (pianist Luke Howard, drummer Daniel Farrugia and bassist Jonathan Zion) that sounds ravishing in this cavernous space…

Issues of language and labelling are touched on but the dominant thread is that of human rights, in particular the mistreatment and exploitation of neuro-diverse and physically disabled people (these are the terms used by the performers and also argued over)….

Later, *The Shadow* … artfully turns the tables, asking the audience to consider the future, one in which norms are not set by humans, but by Artificial Intelligence.

How will we all feel, asks Price, whose forthright personality tends to dominate the proceedings, when our capacities are judged to AI standards and we are all found to be in some way deficient or disabled?

**Jason Blake for Audrey Journal**

**3.5 stars**

**Full Review:** [**https://www.audreyjournal.com.au/arts/the-shadow-whose-prey-the-hunter-becomes-carriageworks-review/**](https://www.audreyjournal.com.au/arts/the-shadow-whose-prey-the-hunter-becomes-carriageworks-review/)

The work was sumptuously visual and sonically relentless. It re-coded the audience’s gaze by focusing on theatre’s role in the brutal subjugation of neuro-diverse people. It pummelled right into the sticky classification of disabilities and their other…

At the centre of a cavernous space, five humble chairs are being set up. The performers are discussing masturbation. And the rules of public versus private touching. And the rules of being touched appropriately by another. Or not…

When theatre disguises itself as civic action, or when civic action disguises itself as theatre, spectators sit in the thorny tension of being – [as Judith Butler described](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/26264793-notes-toward-a-performative-theory-of-assembly) – either “the people” or “the people who are not ‘the people’.” What kind of people are we?..

The drama of misfire is central to Back to Back’s work. With each apparent failure, spectators reckon with the theatrical frame: do we consider these failures more real than in other performances, because these actors have been traditionally perceived as nonprofessional? Back to Back seamlessly, ruthlessly, challenge and unsettle the ways audiences read the veracity - or virtuosity - of the performers. These actors are seasoned at playing a version of themselves. Slippages between authenticity and fabrication are masterfully delivered. The performers work the text to precision timing. Beats are rarely missed – except when that is the point…

The dialogue ducks and weaves. The performers continuously upend each other and the audience from landing anywhere comfortable…

We face a future, we are told, in which we will all be outstripped by AI. In this world where artificial intelligence leaves behind human intelligence, we will all have intellectual disabilities. So where will this leave us?

This is the purpose of the meeting: to consider what kind of public we ought to be.

Back to Back Theatre give us no answers. Just encounters with ourselves.

**Bryoni Trezise for The Conversation**

**Full Review:** [**https://theconversation.com/the-shadow-whose-prey-the-hunter-becomes-review-back-to-back-theatres-exciting-reframing-of-disability-124003**](https://theconversation.com/the-shadow-whose-prey-the-hunter-becomes-review-back-to-back-theatres-exciting-reframing-of-disability-124003)

An hour with this ensemble arguably offers more wisdom, and more stringent argument, than anything in politics, though barbed irony is never far away. The nature of “respect” for the marginalised, of speaking for the voiceless, comes into question immediately. politics and language of disability are dissected through experience… and the show lays bare the grim litany of discrimination and abuse that people with intellectual disability have faced through history.The inspired final nail in the argument – that all modern humans may be regarded as intellectually disabled from the viewpoint of future AI – is driven home with deliberate didacticism, as if the audience is a bit slow on the uptake. And perhaps we are. The prospect of technology inheriting moral disability is frightening, though it’s hard to see why we should expect our robot overlords to treat humans any better than we treat each other. The Shadow Whose Prey the Hunter Becomes offers an urgent and uncompromising conversation about the state of humanity. It scintillates in the clarity and sophistication of its ideas, and in its seamless interplay between creativity and critique.

**Cameron Woodhead for The Age**

**4 stars**

**Full Review:** [**https://www.theage.com.au/culture/theatre/the-shadow-whose-prey-the-hunter-becomes-20191011-p52zry.html**](https://www.theage.com.au/culture/theatre/the-shadow-whose-prey-the-hunter-becomes-20191011-p52zry.html)

The underlying aim of Geelong’s Back To Back Theatre company, they say, is to question assumptions about what’s possible in theatre. With their latest production, *The Shadow Whose Prey The Hunter Becomes,* that questioning isn’t just aimed at the theatre stage, but the world at large.

They [the ensemble] are treated like second-class citizens. For centuries this has had truly devastating implications for people in similar positions, and still today society is hostile to their attempts at growth. But the world is changing. AI is rapidly infiltrating our lives, which means in the future all humans will have intellectual disabilities. The tone at times grows heated and desperate. There’s much to fear and a lot of self-reflection to be done as we consider whether we’ve been complicit in the perpetuation of a hierarchy that dehumanises many. *The Shadow Whose Prey The Hunter Becomes*is provocative and will leave you with questions. It’ll also make you want to tell your friends to go see it. Now.

**Augustus Welby for The Music**

**4 stars**

**Full Review:** [**https://themusic.com.au/reviews/the-shadow-whose-prey-the-hunter-becomes-arts-centre-melbourne-miaf-augustus-welby/n6y7s7K1tLc/**](https://themusic.com.au/reviews/the-shadow-whose-prey-the-hunter-becomes-arts-centre-melbourne-miaf-augustus-welby/n6y7s7K1tLc/)

The power of Back to Back’s work is always in the performances. The core ensemble has a range of intellectual disabilities, which means that each actor brings to their performance a very particular and perilous sense of exposure. There is no question, at any time, that they aren’t acting, but their disabilities also force them to be wholly themselves on stage, something they share with only the very best actors.

This sense of transparency means that their theatre foregrounds, in a way that few other companies do, the

knowledge that the work is being made, in each moment, before our eyes. This calls up a strong sense of

presence in the audience, an effortless engagement that’s at the heart of all great theatre. It also does interesting things to time: we’re wholly aware of duration but all sense of its weight is abolished. And it’s never safe theatre: Back to Back’s work is at once gentle and brutal, welcoming and full of spikes.

**Alison Croggan for The Saturday**

**4 stars**

**Full Review:** [**https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/2019/10/19/the-shadow-whose-prey-the-hunter-becomes/15714036008941**](https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/2019/10/19/the-shadow-whose-prey-the-hunter-becomes/15714036008941)

**SELECTED AUDIENCE FEEDBACK**

*“It was such a brilliant, extremely well-made piece. I was constantly switching a tension between insulted and relieved. Intelligent, smart and so simple. In some scenes beautiful lines and performers power reached my heart and made me teary eyed. Thank you for the amazing performance last night. Thanks to the performers and the team”*

- Via Facebook

*“wow wow wow congrats Back To Back Theatre on The Shadow Whose Prey the Hunter Becomes <3 go see it people! Brilliance! I could have gone straight back into the theatre and watched it again”*

- Via Twitter

*“Performance is always about courage, I know, it’s always full of fear and doubt - but these guys are warriors, gladiators - they march into the ring, into the public space, prepared to die with honour. They never fail to go to places others fear to enter. Always funny, always immensely serious, always provoking us more astutely than any other poet or playwright manages to do.”*

- Via email

*“The whole play caused some very deep and meaningful discussion in the car on the way home.*

*I’d just call it a “very very very great night out at the theatre!!’ Congratulations to the whole company.”*

- Via email

*“How unique a voice Back To Back has for humanity; it is a guiding light and beacon of hope for all marginalised groups.*

*A continued inspiration for me always.”*

- Via email

*“Now while I was teeeechnically coerced into seeing this, cannot recommend highly enough. Phenomenal actors, sharp humour, stealth cyberpunk... Get to it. Its amazing.”*

-Via twitter

*“I thoroughly enjoyed the show, and was proud to have been part of the standing ovation at the end. I thought the performances were very strong, honest and authentic. The writing and directing was both bold and nuanced, with much skill shown in interweaving the themes together in a manner that was edgy and unpredictable.”*

- Via email

*“I am blessed to live in Manhattan and I take advantage of seeing as much theater as I possibly can, particularly off-Broadway productions.  However, what I experienced with your production left me breathless.  I think it was the most memorable and amazing production I have witnessed in many, many years.  Please note my words – not ‘one of the most’ but rather ‘THE most’… The acting, the script, the production – above and beyond exemplary – a rich tapestry of excellence.  A rare and most fulfilling afternoon at the theater.”*

- Via email

*What an elegant and profound piece on... everything! You all brought to the stage an authenticity that is rare in our social-media-consumed world. I cried, laughed, pondered, remembered and then I was the first to stand for the applause.”*

-Via email