

and become an outlaw when there were a thousand other ways "to ease your blood Of Australia's restlessness or Ireland's rebellion or the bitter convict memories, whatever it is That denies you peace and sleep." His message is one of "mercy and understanding," but Ned says, "Oh, don't talk rot," and goes off into an inflated justification of his career and a romantic description of his life in the bush ("A man's country, all ridges and rocks and gum-trees. . . They call it the Kelly country. We ride the boundaries").

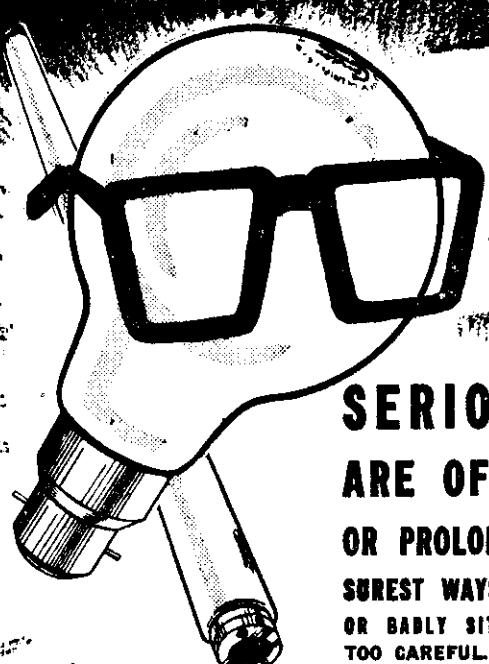
The gang are next seen in their hide-out several months later. The first signs of disintegration appear when Steve Hart, a weak, grafting whinger, wants to get away to Queensland or else kill Ned himself in the hope of a light sentence in reward. The arrival of Ned's girlfriend (Ruth Alley) reveals a plot by Joe Byrne's friend Aaron Sherritt to inform on the gang. They decide to kill Sherritt and then derail the train of police and black trackers who will be sent after them. This scene's exterior setting demonstrates Raymond Boyce's command of atmosphere in a design which matches well the verbal description of the gang's isolation and loneliness in the ranges, like "four dead trees in the sunset."

The murder of Sherritt (John Carson-Parker) inside his farmhouse is the most successful scene in the play, with its strong handling of suspense. Ned tears up the railway lines with the help of a rhetorical Irish ganger named Reardon (John Gordon), and the gang wait for the crash inside the Glenrowan pub, where the customers once again enjoy free drinks, this time to the tune of "A Wild Colonial Boy." When the police, or "traps" as they are called, surround the gang in the hotel, Byrne is shot at the window. Dan and Steve shoot themselves (offstage), and Ned stalks out in his armour to fight on single-handed, a grotesque automaton-like figure in the misty dawn light.

Richard Campion has shown in his production a keen sense of the poetry of the text, which is reminiscent at times of the dramas of Yeats and Synge. There is an elfin quality in Michael Cotterill's interpretation of the role of Joe Byrne, exploiting a genuinely poetic, Irish sensibility which appears in slightly different form in the character of Reardon, who is volubly aware of the "strangeness" of the deeds he is involved in. A good deal of condensing has been done in the longer poetic speeches, although in the bar-room scene where Gribble, Ned and Richards become symbols of the abstract forces of mercy, revenge and justice—the most difficult scene in the play—as well as in the hide-out scene, some more cutting is still needed. Roy Patrick, physically ideal for the leading role, has got inside the part of Ned Kelly with strong sincerity. He gives a performance which reflects the degree of competence of all who were concerned in the production of this play.

—P.J.W.

"INDEXING nowadays has become a science, and when science pushes in art flies away. It wasn't always so. Indexing once was an art into which the compiler poured his creative soul. He was perhaps a frustrated poet, dreaming of thousand-line epics on the Spanish Armada, forced by 10 hungry children to grub in the lowest basement of literature but refusing to be crushed into utter servitude. Those who knew his style could tell their friends: I see poor Boggles did the index for Scoddles latest cookery and household compendium." —Dennis McEldowney, in an NZBS Book Shop talk.



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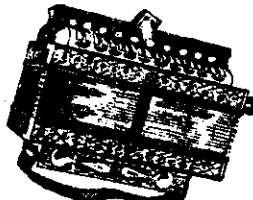
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