

Excerpt terms and conditions



This excerpt is available to assist you in the play selection process.

You may view, print and download any of our excerpts for perusal purposes.

Excerpts are not intended for performance, classroom or other academic use. In any of these cases you will need to purchase playbooks via our website or by phone, fax or mail.

A short excerpt is not always indicative of the entire work, and we strongly suggest reading the whole play before planning a production or ordering a cast quantity.

Dramatic Publishing

The
Ash
Girl



Drama
by
Timberlake Wertenbaker

The Ash Girl

*Drama/Comedy. By Timberlake Wertenbaker. Cast: 4m., 8w., 9 either gender, doubling possible. In a big old house Ashgirl lives huddled deep in the protection of an ashy hearth. With her mother dead and her father away, she lives with her stepmother and two stepsisters. When the invitation to the ball arrives from the prince, Ashgirl finds the strength to go with the help of her friends, some of whom come from unexpected places. When she gets home, Ashie realizes that in order to regain the fleeting happiness she found in the arms of the prince, she must fight the monsters who have slithered and insinuated their way into her heart and mind. She must believe in herself for others to do so. "...an ambitious play with hints of the Brothers Grimm, medieval allegory and anthropomorphism...it has a quirky originality...[Ashgirl] is prey to self-doubt and is under the thumb of her stepmother, while her prince is an exiled Asian isolated and unhappy in his new country. Wertenbaker's biggest innovation is to suggest that the forest en route to the palace is populated by an animalized version of the Seven Deadly Sins, which are out to destroy humanity. She even adds a further allegorical figure, Sadness, who tries to tempt Ashgirl towards death, and battles with the Fairy in the Mirror for her soul. The result is like a mix of C.S. Lewis and Sondheim's *Into the Woods*: an eclectic fairy tale anthology. Where Wertenbaker scores is in her eye for eccentric detail." (The Guardian, London). Area staging. Approximate running time: 2 hours.*

ISBN 13: 978-1-58342-160-4



9 781583 421604 >

www.DramaticPublishing.com

Code: AA2

Cover design by Jeanette Alig-Sergel



Printed on Recycled Paper

THE ASH GIRL

A Play in Two Acts

by

TIMBERLAKE WERTENBAKER



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

*** NOTICE ***

The amateur and stock acting rights to this work are controlled exclusively by THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY without whose permission in writing no performance of it may be given. Royalty fees are given in our current catalog and are subject to change without notice. Royalty must be paid every time a play is performed whether or not it is presented for profit and whether or not admission is charged. A play is performed any time it is acted before an audience. All inquiries concerning amateur and stock rights should be addressed to:

DRAMATIC PUBLISHING
P. O. Box 129, Woodstock, Illinois 60098
www.dramaticpublishing.com

COPYRIGHT LAW GIVES THE AUTHOR OR THE AUTHOR'S AGENT THE EXCLUSIVE RIGHT TO MAKE COPIES. This law provides authors with a fair return for their creative efforts. Authors earn their living from the royalties they receive from book sales and from the performance of their work. Conscientious observance of copyright law is not only ethical, it encourages authors to continue their creative work. This work is fully protected by copyright. No alterations, deletions or substitutions may be made in the work without the prior written consent of the publisher. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, videotape, film, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. It may not be performed either by professionals or amateurs without payment of royalty. All rights, including but not limited to the professional, motion picture, radio, television, videotape, foreign language, tabloid, recitation, lecturing, publication and reading, are reserved.

For performance of any songs, music and recordings mentioned in this play which are in copyright, the permission of the copyright owners must be obtained or other songs and recordings in the public domain substituted.

©MM by
TIMBERLAKE WERTENBAKER

Printed in the United States of America
All Rights Reserved
(THE ASH GIRL)

For inquiries concerning all other rights, contact:
Mel Kenyon, Casarotto Ramsay and Associates Ltd.,
National House, 60-66 Wardour Street,
London W1V 4ND

ISBN: 1-58342-160-2

For Dushka

WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING about *The Ash Girl*...

“A wonderful approach to a classic story—provides interesting and challenging roles for entire ensemble. Juicy roles for six women. Provides a wonderful opportunity for physically able character types to shine as the sins. Appealed to our audiences—great response and standing ovations.”

*Karen Stitely,
Catoctin High School,
Thurmont, Md.*

“*Ash Girl* was a great success. Having the Seven Deadly Sins be unseen and unheard by the other characters in the play was a very effective device. Initially, I was afraid the audience wouldn’t ‘get it,’ especially the younger kids, but they did and they loved it.”

*David Ely, Lincoln School,
Providence, R.I.*

“I love how it takes a familiar story and adds new light and creativity! It is so much more than a fairy tale! I produced *The Love of a Nightingale* a few years ago and was thrilled to do another Timberlake Wertenbaker play!”

*Drama Director,
Ocean Lakes High School,
Virginia Beach, Va.*

The Ash Girl was first presented at Birmingham Repertory Theatre on December 8, 2000. The cast, in order of appearance, was as follows:

Ruth	JANE CAMERON
Judith	RACHEL SMITH
Ashgirl	STEPHANIE POCHIN
Mother	VIVIEN PARRY
Princess Zehra	SOUAD FARESS
Prince Amir	JUSTIN AVOTH
Paul	HUSS GARBIYA
Slothworm	ALEX JONES
Angerbird	TRACY WILES
Envysnake/Owl	KENN SABBERTON
Gluttonoad/Fairy	DARLENE JOHNSON
Pridefly/Spider	JONATHAN BOND
Greedmonkey/Otter	TOGO IGAWA
Sadness	SARAH COOMES
Lust	EMMA LOWNDES
Man in the Forest	KEN SHORTER
Girlmouse	MILLIE COLES/NATALIE SMITH
Boymouse	EZRAH ROBERTS-GREY/JOSEPH TURNER

PRODUCTION STAFF

Director	LUCY BAILEY
Designer	ANGELA DAVIES
Lighting Designer	CHAHINI YAVROYAN
Composer	ORLANDO GOUGH
Choreographer	MICHAEL DOLAN

IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

All producers of the play *must* give credit to the author(s) of the play in all programs distributed in connection with performances of the play and in all instances in which the title of the play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the play and/or a production. The name of the author(s) *must* also appear on a separate line, on which no other name appears, immediately following the title, and *must* appear in size of type not less than fifty percent the size of the title type. Biographical information on the author(s), if included in this book, may be used on all programs. *On all programs this notice must appear:*

“Produced by special arrangement with
THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY of Woodstock, Illinois”

THE ASH GIRL

A Play in Two Acts

For 4m., 8w., 9 either gender, doubling possible

CHARACTERS (in order of appearance)

RUTH
JUDITH
ASHGIRL
MOTHER
PRINCESS ZEHRA
PRINCE AMIR
PAUL
SLOTHWORM
ANGERBIRD
ENVY SNAKE
GLUTTON TOAD
PRIDEFLY
GREED MONKEY
SADNESS
LUST
MAN IN THE FOREST
OWL
OTTER
FAIRY IN THE MIRROR
GIRLMOUSE
BOYMOUSE

SETTING: The house, the palace, the forest.

ACT ONE

Scene One who lives in the house

The breakfast room of a dilapidated medieval-type house. A very large hearth, thickly blanketed with ashes. A massive sideboard, laden with foods. The room is dark.

RUTH and JUDY enter. As they come in, there is a movement in the ashes, a ripple, no more. The two girls skip to and from the sideboard, lifting the heavy silver covers and helping themselves with glee.

RUTH. Chicken.

JUDITH. Pigeon.

RUTH. Casseroled pheasant.

JUDITH. Boiled swan.

RUTH. Wild boar.

JUDITH. Pig's ears with juniper berries.

RUTH. Clotted cream.

JUDITH. And damson jam.

RUTH. I feel full.

JUDITH. I feel fat.

RUTH. Mother says we must be thin.

JUDITH. Why?

RUTH. Because girls must be thin.

JUDITH. Why?

RUTH. How *do* you get thin?

JUDITH. You stop eating.

RUTH. Stop eating damson jam! Swan and sausages?
Never.

JUDITH. We could start getting thin tomorrow. Today, I
want an unboring day.

RUTH. We could practise our dancing.

JUDITH. Boring. I want a good gallop over the fields.

RUTH. Father took away the last horse.

JUDITH. Took the horse and vanished.

RUTH. Into thin air.

JUDITH. Into a bear.

RUTH. A thin, a hairy, a grisly bear.

JUDITH. Waits in his lair ...

(They burst out laughing. A movement in the ashes.)

RUTH. We could read a book.

JUDITH. I'm bored with happy endings. Why can't the
monster eat everyone?

RUTH. What about that book on manners?

JUDITH. We don't need manners, we never see anyone.

RUTH. I'd like to paint, but Mother says it makes me look
a mess.

JUDITH. I'd like to find a worm, open it and see what's
inside. Open the stomach of a mouse, cut the legs off an
ant, see if they move. I'd need one of those glasses that
make everything big.

RUTH. There's one in Father's study, shall we take it?

(A movement in the ashes.)

JUDITH. Mother keeps the key: wait till she's asleep, steal the key, take everything out of the study. That would be very unbor-ing.

RUTH. When he finds out?

JUDITH. He's never coming back. Never never—

RUTH. Ever after ...

JUDITH. A grizzly bear ...

RUTH. In his lair ...

(Movement in the ashes. And now a figure emerges, grey, spectral, skeletally thin, a girl of about seventeen.)

JUDITH. Ashgirl. Eyeing us.

RUTH. Spying.

JUDITH. Look and tell.

ASHGIRL. I will tell Mother you're planning to steal the key.

(They seize her arms.)

RUTH. You won't!

JUDITH. She won't believe you.

ASHGIRL. I always tell the truth.

RUTH. It's the way you tell it!

JUDITH. Boring. Very boring. Lies are more interesting.

ASHGIRL. How can the truth be boring? Father admon-
ished me always to tell the truth.

RUTH. And where is he now?

JUDITH. The grizzly bear ...

ASHGIRL. Stop it!

(The GIRLS laugh.)

RUTH. Come on, Ashie, have some breakfast.

ASHGIRL. No thank you.

RUTH. Food in this house not good enough for you?

JUDITH. Growing girl must eat. (*ASHGIRL tries to return to the ashes, but JUDITH takes a sausage, hands it to ASHGIRL.*) Take it!

(ASHGIRL shakes her head. RUTH takes a scone, lots of cream and jam. Proffers it.)

RUTH. When your sisters offer, you accept, you say thank you.

ASHGIRL. I don't want anything.

RUTH. Book says: bad manners to refuse a gift. I like books which tell other people what to do.

(They wait. ASHGIRL looks at the food in disgust.)

JUDITH. Eat!

RUTH. She's so rude.

JUDITH. Stuff it in her mouth. (*RUTH grinds the scone in ASHGIRL's mouth. She gags, spits, more grinding, more violent. JUDITH eats the sausage, calmly.*) I could eat a fried pig's heart.

RUTH (*to ASHGIRL, on the floor*). Lick the crumbs. Say sorry.

(They pin her down.)

JUDITH. That's compulsory.

RUTH. Conclusory.

JUDITH. Persuatory.

RUTH. We're waiting.

JUDITH. Maybe another scone? Gnawed bone of swan?

ASHGIRL. Sorry ...

RUTH. Sorry for?

ASHGIRL. Sorry—for—for being—me.

(They let her go. A moment.)

RUTH. The thing is, Ashie, if you were nicer to us, we'd be nicer to you.

(The GIRLS leave, ASHGIRL sinks back into the ashes.)

Scene Two who lives in the ashes

ASHGIRL. I don't remember much. It was another countryside, another country. Flowers inside. My mother loved flowers. I don't know when she died, if she died. I was always with my father. He was my friend. I am your friend forever, he said. He took me everywhere, travels, hunting, I sat under castle tables and listened to the men talk. We slept on his cloak in the woods, naming the stars. Until we came here. First for an afternoon, then a night, then days, and finally to stay. He never told me he wanted to marry her, he didn't even ask me, his friend. And that these girls would be his daughters, call themselves my sisters. He said he loved me most, but he needed, needed—but he loved me. He wasn't happy long. I saw lines of loneliness return to his face. I went to him, but he was strange. He told me he was not a good man,

he had monsters to fight. I said I would fight them with him, but he said no, these monsters were different, they'd poisoned the blood to his heart and I must forgive him. And so my father went in search of his heart and broke mine. And that's when I found the ashes. Ashes are warm and in the ashes no one sees you, you do no wrong. Ashes on your head, no one talks to you, ashes on your arms, no one touches you, ashes are safe. I will stay in these ashes, melt into them, shrink to their weightlessness. Cloak of crumbling grey. My ashes.

Scene Three
who goes to the ball

The MOTHER comes in. She is held back, neat, straight. The GIRLS follow her. She holds a large golden scroll in her hand.

MOTHER. I hoped it was from my husband, gifts, money.

It's an invitation—addressed to all the daughters of the house.

JUDITH/RUTH. We are the daughters of the house.

RUTH. We haven't been anywhere all winter.

MOTHER. You mustn't be seen with the wrong people.

JUDITH. What are wrong people?

MOTHER. When there's no father, people talk.

RUTH. Let me read it.

MOTHER. It's addressed to all the daughters of the house. *(She makes a gesture towards the ashes.)*

RUTH. I'm the oldest.

JUDITH. But I'm clever.

(RUTH and JUDITH both snatch at the scroll.)

MOTHER. You can have a look too, Ashgirl.

ASHGIRL *(from the ashes)*. I'm not interested.

MOTHER. It is to all my daughters.

ASHGIRL *(emerging from the ashes)*. I'm not your daughter!

MOTHER. Clean yourself up. You look disgusting. And you've got crumbs all over your face.

ASHGIRL. I'll clear the breakfast.

MOTHER. Judith and Ruth can help you.

ASHGIRL. I like to do it myself.

MOTHER. You don't help yourself, Ashgirl. I've heard people whispering I'm not nice to you, but I try.

(RUTH and JUDITH are unrolling the scroll. The decoration is ornate, golds and browns.)

RUTH. "You are invited..."

MOTHER. That paper is too bright.

JUDITH. The letters are of gold...

MOTHER. People shouldn't show off.

JUDITH. "To dance..."

MOTHER. Is it real gold?

RUTH. "At the palace of..."

MOTHER. A palace...

RUTH. "Princess Zehra."

MOTHER. A princess!

RUTH. "In honour of her son, Prince Amir's..."

MOTHER. Amir?

RUTH. "Birthday on"—it's next week!

JUDITH. We don't have any ball gowns.

MOTHER. It's not a local name, they're foreigners.

RUTH. A prince!

MOTHER. That's always interesting. And rich. But foreign.

JUDITH. He could be from Araby.

MOTHER. Everyone important will be there, we have to go.

RUTH. What are we going to wear?

MOTHER. A normal responsible father would have heard of this ball and sent rich cloths, shoes of brocade. It seems we'll have to manage with some old gowns of mine.

ASHGIRL. I'll help alter them.

MOTHER. I suppose you have to go.

JUDITH. Ashgirl? She'll embarrass us.

ASHGIRL. I don't want to.

MOTHER. If you're not there, people will say it's because I'm wicked.

ASHGIRL. No one will notice.

MOTHER. Don't ever say I didn't ask you. I won't be called a mean stepmother. No one ever sees the other side.

RUTH. When you meet a prince, what do you do?

MOTHER. You get him to marry you. He'll provide all you want.

JUDITH. Will he provide me with interesting and rare stones?

RUTH. Salted hams dangling from a vaulted ceiling?

MOTHER. One of you will marry the Prince, but you'll have to work at it. I'll tell you how as we look at my gowns. There's no time to lose.

(They begin to sweep out.)

JUDITH. Rooms of marble...

RUTH. Cakes...

(ASHGIRL remains alone.)

ASHGIRL. Ashes...

Scene Four
who lives in the palace

PRINCESS ZEHRA's palace. It is nomadic and Oriental in colour and feel: cushions, rugs, no hard furniture, a sense of luxury in the cloth as well as many books, scrolls, illuminated manuscripts.

PRINCE AMIR, in his twenties. Dark, melancholic, anger simmering, reclines on cushions, reading. PRINCESS ZEHRA opens envelopes. A large pile is already thickening next to her.

ZEHRA. Everyone has accepted.

AMIR. Since the miserable day we settled here, not one person has come to welcome us.

ZEHRA. They're all coming now.

AMIR. No one has invited us. This country knows nothing of hospitality.

ZEHRA. There are two sides to hospitality, Amir: our hosts are not welcoming, so we must be generous guests. Every girl in the region is coming to dance and some will be beautiful.

AMIR. No one is beautiful here, their skin is too white, they all look like boiled potatoes.

ZEHRA. You must not speak like someone with a shrivelled heart.

AMIR. Are you denying they're all ugly?

ZEHRA. You sometimes have to adjust your eyes to see beauty.

AMIR. You mean close them!

ZEHRA. We haven't yet learned to find beauty in this country, we will.

AMIR. Never! Grey. Rain. Small hills. A forest with trees packed in so tight you can't even canter. I loved my gallops on the plains, the stars at night lancing the desert sky.

ZEHRA. We'll become part of this country and learn to love it.

AMIR. I'm going back.

ZEHRA. There's nothing to go back to.

AMIR. I'll find my father. If he is a prisoner, I'll free him. If he is dead, I'll avenge him and take back our pastures.

ZEHRA. You'll find no trace of him or of our land. You will marry here and that will root you in this country. It's not the first time our family has moved to a new land.

AMIR. Always as conquerors.

ZEHRA. We can still impress.

AMIR. I don't want to marry now.

(ZEHRA looks at what AMIR is reading.)

ZEHRA. Why do you read poetry if you don't want to fall in love?

AMIR. I could not love a girl who loved this grey.

ZEHRA. There are many ways of being a foreigner in a country: you can be exiled like us, or you can be badly

treated in your own land and feel a stranger. I have seen many people here with the forlorn look of foreigners.

AMIR. No one here has that depth of feeling.

ZEHRA. Beware of too much homesickness, my son, it's a worm that eats hope and gnaws at your strength.

AMIR. And why aren't you homesick at all? Why don't you ever grieve for my father?

ZEHRA. How can you know what I feel! *(Pause.)* I am a mother. I owe my son a future.

AMIR. I may not want it.

ZEHRA. So much anger. Here comes Paul. Look at him, he's relinquished his anger and he is happy.

(PAUL comes in, also "Indian," but expansive, more "western.")

PAUL. You're giving a ball, Princess, that is an excellent and a brilliant idea. And I have learned many of this country's dances. Look, Amir: you'll like this one. *(He begins to demonstrate. ZEHRA and even AMIR laugh.)* It's the very latest. Come and learn it, Amir, I've watched the boys in this country and modesty and restraint are out the windows. If we want to get on, we have to show off.

AMIR. Never!

PAUL. Amir.

ZEHRA. We're only asking you to dance.