

SYNOPSIS OF THE USHER'S BALL
(two acts; fifteen scenes)

TIME: The present and 1917-1918, during World War One

PLACE: Minimal furnishings suggest various locations in London, England.

CHARACTERS: (an ensemble of a minimum of eight actors: five men; three women)

EDGAR ASHBOURNE, an elderly American usher and retired major, minister, and physician
ANNABELLE LEE SNOWDEN, an English organist and composer, late twenties
DOCTOR GERALD SNOWDEN, Annabelle's father, a surgeon, mid-fifties
HELEN SNOWDEN, Annabelle's mother, a nurse and amateur photographer, fifty
MAVIS MERYL PALEY, Annabelle's aunt, a British suffragette, late forties
CAPTAIN WILFRED BLACKSTONE, a British soldier, late twenties
DOCTOR RUPERT WHITEHALL, an Irish born surgeon, mid-sixties
DOCTOR SYDNEY PEARLMAN, a British psychiatrist, mid-thirties
HEADMASTER THEODORE GRIMMEL, LIEUTENANT CHARLES MOORINGS,
PRIVATE GODFREY GLUMMER, REVEREND RODERICK CHALKIN, SERGEANT THOMAS
TARBOX, UNKNOWN GERMAN SOLDIER, GHOST SOLDIERS

PLOT SYNOPSIS : An elderly usher, Edgar Ashbourne, is hosting a ball, but before the dining and dancing commence, the guests must convene in the theatre to witness a play of his own contriving in which he plays several roles. The play is an ill-fated romance that takes place in London during World War One. A lonely composer, Annabelle Snowden, is followed home from theatre by an admiring usher, Wilfred Blackstone, who introduces himself as a wounded veteran and teacher at a local boys academy. As they stand chatting, a bolt of lightning strikes Wilfred who is severely burned, then taken to recuperate at a military hospital. While there, he feels a compulsion to dig up the hospital grounds, reenacting the nightmare of shoveling trenches on the western front. He unwittingly excavates the bones of ancient warriors, is joined by archeologists, and becomes famous throughout England as "The Digger." Annabelle visits Wilfred regularly and finds herself falling in love. While retrieving clothing from his flat, she discovers a diary written in German that implicates Wilfred as a possible spy. Annabelle's Aunt Mavis translates the diary, which reveals Wilfred to be a pacifist who has allowed an enemy soldier to escape, then wounded himself to avoid combat. Both offenses are punishable by execution, and Wilfred is eventually discovered and officially charged. Meanwhile, as he sleeps, Wilfred's soul escapes his body to become the spiritual usher of deceased soldiers leaving the hospital to the world beyond. When Wilfred finally recovers his health, he is not the man Annabelle believes him to be, and a tragic separation ensues.

THEMES: The Usher's Ball touches on themes of love, loss, the futility of war, and the psychological cost to the soldiers who fight it and the civilians who suffer the consequences. "The war to end all wars" cost the lives of ten million men, and is now regarded as a folly fueled by misguided nationalism and leaders intent on vengeance through violence. Despite a worldwide pacifist movement, the tragic treadmill of slaughter continues.

