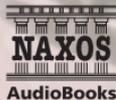


# ALAN GARNER

## THE OWL SERVICE

NA593112D

Read by **Wayne Forester**

**NAXOS**  
AudioBooks

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1	<b>The Owl Service: Chapter 1</b>	8:34
2	<b>Chapter 2</b>	6:28
3	Roger changed quickly and went up to Alison...	7:32
4	<b>Chapter 3</b>	8:47
5	<b>Chapter 4</b>	8:07
6	<b>Chapter 5</b>	6:46
7	Roger and his father came into the yard.	4:04
8	<b>Chapter 6</b>	6:12
9	<b>Chapter 7</b>	7:07
10	<b>Chapter 8</b>	5:24
11	When Gwyn reached the house...	4:31
12	<b>Chapter 9</b>	6:27
13	'This is the stone,' said Roger...	4:49
14	'Taking photos are you?'	6:06
15	<b>Chapter 10</b>	8:31
16	<b>Chapter 11</b>	6:29
17	Gwyn's head jerked back against the tree...	7:14
18	Alison was huddled over her torch...	8:49

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<b>19</b>	<b>Chapter 12</b>	8:01
<b>20</b>	<b>Chapter 13</b>	8:06
<b>21</b>	<b>Chapter 14</b>	5:42
<b>22</b>	Roger showed his father another seven prints...	5:27
<b>23</b>	<b>Chapter 15</b>	4:34
<b>24</b>	Then Gwyn finished washing up.	4:48
<b>25</b>	<b>Chapter 16</b>	6:22
<b>26</b>	'What are you wanting to do when you leave school Alison?'	5:49
<b>27</b>	Gwyn set off across the plateau.	6:47
<b>28</b>	<b>Chapter 17</b>	8:44
<b>29</b>	<b>Chapter 18</b>	6:22
<b>30</b>	Clive sat on the edge of the fish tank...	5:24
<b>31</b>	<b>Chapter 19</b>	4:09
<b>32</b>	'How absolutely embarrassing...'	5:42
<b>33</b>	<b>Chapter 20</b>	5:13
<b>34</b>	'In for a penny in for a pound,' said Gwyn...	5:16
<b>35</b>	<b>Chapter 21</b>	7:46
<b>36</b>	<b>Chapter 22</b>	6:31

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<b>37</b>	<b>Chapter 23</b>	5:06
<b>38</b>	His hand thrashed against something firm...	3:58
<b>39</b>	<b>Chapter 24</b>	4:54
<b>40</b>	'What's going to happen?'	5:48
<b>41</b>	<b>Chapter 25</b>	4:55
<b>42</b>	Roger dived back into the rain.	4:14
<b>43</b>	<b>Chapter 26</b>	5:41
<b>44</b>	The crowd thinned, dispersed...	5:51
<b>45</b>	<b>Chapter 27</b>	6:47
<b>46</b>	Roger put on clean clothes.	6:41
<b>47</b>	The skylight smashed under a branch...	5:34

**Total time: 4:52:42**

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Alan Garner

## THE OWL SERVICE

There are immortal forces at work; the spirits of ancient lovers and their crimes are haunting a valley that cannot rid itself of their ghosts; and all it will take to release them is to trace the design from a dinner service.

Alison and Roger are step-siblings. Their parents have recently married, and decide that for the family to get to know each other better they should go on holiday to Wales. The large house they stay in has been in Alison's family for years. At the house, there is a cook and housekeeper called Nancy and her son, Gwyn, who is much the same age as Roger and Alison. One day, Alison is unwell in bed, and thinks she hears a noise from the attic. There doesn't seem to be anything there, though – except an old collection of plates, with an interesting design. And Alison starts to trace it onto some paper...

What happens after that is the story of *The Owl Service*. It has as its root a tale

from the Mabinogion – the collection of Welsh myths. These were first collected in the fourteenth century, but probably go back a further two thousand years at least before that. In the same way that the Arthurian myths have been the source of inspiration for many artists and writers since they were first published (there is an argument that the *Star Wars* films, for example, are essentially a retelling of the legend of Arthur), the Mabinogion has also been an endless well of ideas. Although the story in *The Owl Service* does far more than repeat this tale, it may be useful to know the background that Alan Garner used for his novel.

The beautiful Blodeuwedd was created out of oak, broom and meadowsweet in order to marry Lleu Llaw Gyffes. But she fell in love with another man – Goronwy Pebyr, the lord of Pennllyn – and tricked Lleu Llaw Gyffes into being killed. He, though, was turned into an eagle, and eventually his soul was restored to the

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figure of a man. Meanwhile, Blodeuwedd and Goronwy were living together; but Lleu was determined to have his revenge. When he finally caught up with Goronwy and had the opportunity to launch his spear at him, Goronwy insisted on being allowed to have a slab of stone between him and the spear. Lleu allowed it; but so strong and sure was his throw that it pierced the rock cleanly before killing Goronwy. Blodeuwedd, knowing that there were those who wanted revenge on her, had fled to the woods. There she was finally cornered and because of the shame she had brought on Lleu Llaw Gyffes, turned into an owl, a bird that may not show its face in the day. The word 'blodeuwedd' still means 'owl' in Welsh.

When Alison traces the designs of the dinner service, the spirit of this story is raised from its temporary slumber. And it turns out that this raising of the spirit has happened before; indeed it keeps happening, with generations repeating the cycle of hate and death. They have been gripped by the power and passion of the tale and seem unable to change

it, always falling into the trap of jealousy and revenge. Alison, Roger and Gwyn are a modern reflection of the central characters in the old story, and once they work out what is happening to them, they have to decide how to cope with the supernatural forces they have accidentally released.

But Alan Garner includes in his story very modern concerns, too. There is the tension between the wealthy English and the Welsh whom they see as inferior; at the same time, Gwyn wants to better himself so he can get on in the world, while his mother believes he should accept his social position and stay where he is, leading to tension between them. There are the tensions between the two boys, as they try to cope with their feelings for each other (and Alison); there is tension for Alison between her feelings for Gwyn and the kind of life she is expecting. There is also tension between the children and their new step-parents, and between these adults themselves. There are tensions between the old ways and the new ones, between the forces of the past and the potential of the future.

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This combining of past and present is very much a part of Alan Garner's writing. He was born in Congleton, Cheshire, in 1934 and still lives in the area that has been a home to his family for some three hundred years. It is an area that is rich in myth and legend. Stories of the past are locked in the hills and woods – stories of mysteries that can be revealed to those who will look. He naturally had the accent, too, and the associated vocabulary, providing another link to the past – the poet who wrote *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* seven hundred years ago used language from the region that has hardly changed since. But this accent was itself a problem. As his education progressed he was mocked and even physically chastised for it – it wasn't seen as 'proper' or 'right'. He was a brilliant student and went to Magdalen College in Oxford to study Classics, but left before completing his degree, to answer a different calling. His first novel *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* was the result; and a success. Aspects of all these personal details fuel his stories, and are especially evident in *The Owl Service*:

the struggle between the different social classes; the issue of your accent and what it says about you; having to decide what you will do with your life. He had the education and the ability to be an academic, but chose writing. He could have been an archaeologist, for example, but was drawn to the folk roots that inspire him. This tension between his various identities is the force that gives his writing its directness and urgency.

Alan Garner is a man divided, and in his attempts to reconcile his differences, he joins worlds together. He brings the mythical past to life not by retreating into it, but by making it loom and merge with the present. In his stories, wizards and ancient kings, half-immortals and witches, gods and monsters are as alive and real as the traumas of growing up and having to decide whether to follow your own path or the one set out for you. The oldest tales in the world are not just bedtime stories or flights of fancy; they are alive.

**Notes by Roy McMillan**



**Wayne Forester** is a highly sought after voice artist with many character voices to his name. Work includes Zebedee in the *New Magic Roundabout* and Dad in *Horrid Henry*. He is also the voice of Rockit the Frog, and Roly Mo, the cuddly storytelling Mole in *The Fimbles*, and *The Roly Mo Show*. Wayne has also recorded numerous radio plays for BBC Radio including *Dirk Gentley's Holistic Detective Agency* and *Under Milk Wood*, performing with a digitally re-mastered Richard Burton!

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**The music on this recording was taken from the NAXOS catalogue**

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Slovak Philharmonic Orchestra / Libor Pešek

8.555245

**Music programmed by Sarah Butcher**

### **Credits**

Produced by Roy McMillan  
Recorded at Motivation Sound Studios, London  
Edited by Sarah Butcher

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Alan Garner  
**THE OWL SERVICE**

Read by **Wayne Forester**

When Alison traces the pattern from an old dinner service, she discovers it makes up the shape of an owl. But in releasing the design from the plates, she unleashes an ancient Welsh myth that tries to give itself new life in her, her step-brother Roger and their friend Gwyn.

Unexplained noises coming from everywhere and nowhere;  
uncertain tensions between friends and families; something is stirring...

Alan Garner's award-winning story is a reimagining of a tale from the Mabinogion, in a landscape where the past is present at every turn but can only be faced by three contemporary teenagers. Thrilling and beautiful, *The Owl Service* will resonate with you for years to come.



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Roy McMillan

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