



The Owl Service

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Something is scratching around in the attic above Alison's room. Yet the only thing up there is a stack of grimy old plates. Alison and her stepbrother, Roger, discover that the flowery patterns on the plates, when traced onto paper, can be fitted together to create owls-owls that disappear when no one is watching. With each vanished owl, strange events begin to happen around Alison, Roger, and the caretaker's son, Gwyn. As the kids uncover the mystery of the owl service, they become trapped within a local legend, playing out roles in a tragic love story that has repeated itself for generations... a love story that has always ended in disaster.

The Owl Service Details

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From Reader Review The Owl Service for online ebook

Orinoco Womble (tidy bag and all) says

I really wanted to enjoy this book. I did. It had so much potential!

First, it's set in the Welsh valleys. That in itself is great. Then, you've got the whole mystery of the owl service itself, like why is Alison obsessed with it? What's going on in the locked room? and all like that. But Garner does his own plot a disservice. Maybe he needed a better editor, one who could guide him on how to flesh out these very good bones into something rounded and satisfying for the reader. I really wish Garner had got some help somewhere because it was a cracking idea.

Talk about "show don't tell!" Most of the novel is dialogue, and that's fine in itself. But we aren't told a story, we're given scraps. WHY does "Mummy" never appear? She's either lying down, or out for a walk, or upstairs, never in the same room with her family, with whom she never interacts on the page; she seems to hover over the narrative like a malignant ghost. It's apparently her honeymoon trip with Clive, Hubby No. 2, to her country home in Wales (which actually belongs to daughter Alison). Everyone talks about Mummy, but no one seems to like her much, and that includes Hubby. Clive brings son Roger into the marriage, and there's Gwyn, the live-in help's son. We are never given any real indication of the ages of the three youths, though I figured Alison's mystery illness of "gripes" that opens the novel was probably menstrual pains; given the fact that she becomes the catalyst for the paranormal action, that gives us the adolescent-girl-trope so beloved of this sort of book/movie of the period. (Think Carrie, think Audrey Rose, think The Exorcist). None of these kids act like kids--no fooling about, games, or anything else except one game of ping-pong and another of pool--both with adult Clive. Roger I figured must be what? Fifteen? with his darkroom and all. But we are never told, given the author's fragmentary non-narration. Aside from Alison's yellow hair, we have no idea what any of them look like, either.

The first third or so of the book was fine and held my attention, but then suddenly it becomes this long drawn out whinge of "oh you mustn't talk to me, Mummy doesn't like it." You know what? Gwyn never spits out what he's got on his mind, not even on the several occasions when he *does* manage to get Alison on her own for a minute or two. Not once! There's a lot of chatter about social class and judging people on how they speak--"He's a yob" occurs more than once. I know that sort of classism was and is rife in the UK, but it could have been used better to contrast later events--another trick the author missed.

When we finally get down to it, what happens? Not much, at least not to tie it all into the "legend." Gwyn is so important to the action, instrumental to the legend-narrative and then at the crisis--nothing. Huw is supposedly the centre of the problem and--nothing. Of course--Wales needs these English summer residents to work it all out for them??? But then it's all about the effect on Alison; the villagers are just background. I expected, I don't know--for the village to be swept away in the flood, or at least to have the "poorly built" bridge go out with someone on it.

And then the author cops out with a "Post Script" in which he basically apologises for his novel by explaining its inspiration etc. In my experience, if an author has to explain his purpose to the reader in so many words, it means he has failed in that purpose and he knows it. The earliest example I've seen is the Epilogue scene in Shakespeare's As You Like It, in which he ends by saying something like, "We know this is just a piece of fluff, we don't even have a title for it, call it what you like."

Two stars for a decent idea. One for the poor development.

Wanda says

Wow, a very intense little book. Considering that it's a children's book, there are some very adult themes addressed. Not only are there step-family issues being worked out in the English family involved, but there is a past intertwining of their family with the Welsh woman who is currently working as their housekeeper. Alison's mother seems to be very class conscious and tries to keep her daughter away from the housekeeper's son, Gwyn. The resentment of the Welsh, who are seeing English families usurping homes in their communities for holiday cottages, is prominent as well.

Add to all of this a bit of Celtic mythology playing itself out through the people available to it and a spooky layer of ambiguity overlays the whole tale.

The writing and dialog are choppy, making sudden turns that are difficult to follow. In mid-conversation, characters change the topic so abruptly as to be completely confusing. Once the reader is familiar with this tendency, it becomes a little less jarring, but it still interfered with my enjoyment of the story. Whether the book is written for children or adults, it should flow freely and make sense. I also found the prejudice displayed by Alison's stepfather, Clive, and stepbrother, Roger, against the Welsh people to be distressing.

An interesting little tale with supernatural overtones.

Beth says

In a pastoral Welsh valley, a tragic love story plays itself out anew with each generation. When three teens discover a set of old dishes with an odd design, the haunting legend is set into motion once more. Can Alison, Roger and Gwyn break the cycle?

The suspense and supernatural occurrences drive the plot. Garner is a master storyteller, weaving the past with the present seamlessly. His use of plot devices such as books and village gossips to drop hints and tell part of the story is natural, never forced. The reader must pay close attention to piece the story -- and the relationships of the characters -- together. Welsh rhymes and pronunciations and British words may be a bit of a challenge for some readers.

The attractive cover art will appeal to teens. A full illustration of the plate decoration is included. Fans of supernatural, romantic mysteries will love the paperback version of this award-winning classic.

? ???????? ? ?????? says

I was given this book by my father who thought that it would be good. I read the summary and thought that it was a children's book but I read. In the beginning it was okay but soon it became very difficult to read and I ended up reading half of it and skimming every other page to the end. It was very boring.

mark monday says

an impressionistic tale of three teens reenacting a deadly eternal triangle in a welsh village. strange yearnings and mysterious motivations are anchored by enjoyably prosaic dialogue, the oddly off-kilter use of slang, and a sharp but subtle sense of warfare between the classes. a nicely clean and uncluttered narrative. one of the many endearing parts of this novel is the realization that the patterns of history and destiny that drive the characters forward are being reflected in the flowery patterns found on dinner plates and wallpaper. another charming thing: magical paper cut-outs of owls! but lest you think this is a cute story for tweens, know that the yarn being spun is one rooted in tragedy, violent possessiveness, and eternal regret. and it is a very mystical novel despite all of the expertly-done 'ordinariness'.

i've read that this low-key novel of the past tormenting the present is considered a classic by many. it even boasts a BBC adaptation. if you like Owl Service, you should find the tv series on dvd - it is actually pretty good. some very interesting and rather radical things happening in what is essentially a miniseries for kids. and the program keeps the mysticism intact, hurrah!

i am usually a little amused when i come across new agey 'anglo-saxon mysticism' in real life, in shops and in jewelry and in celtic tattos and whatnot. i can't help but roll my eyes a little at the cliché. is this mythology in some ways symbolic of the yearnings for mysticism and a rich warrior ancestry of the white middle class in general? is this the unfulfilled need that drove mel gibson to Braveheart? who knows. but when i actually read it, in places like this novel and in the Dark Is Rising series of susan cooper, it is a guilt-free pleasure.

(view spoiler)

Amber says

The best thing about this book is the elliptical strangeness of it, the odd otherworldly language and broken narrative structure yet... the worst thing about this book is the elliptical strangeness of it, the odd otherworldly language and broken narrative structure.

I don't see how this is a book for children. The children in the book do not talk like children, or adults for that matter. Everyone talks in circles and riddles. There are large chunks of the narrative missing which you are meant to string together for yourself. It is a difficult book to understand, but perhaps worth the slog for the atmosphere. The story and the characters are fractured, but the atmosphere is there, whole, and pulsing with power.

Jessica says

Very odd story, which I have thought a lot about since reading. I didn't know anything about it at the time, but it was advertised as a children's classic, though I had never heard of it. Later I realized it's a) based on Welsh mythology, and b) a British children's classic, so a lot of the social issues went over my head at first.

But definitely worth the read, spooky without being too scary, and reminiscent of Diana Wynne Jones or Edward Eager, but more mature.

Lolly's Library says

What the hell was this? It started off fine, if a little bit bumpy. I kept waiting for the 'tragic romance' of the premise to begin--frankly, I was waiting for any kind of action to take place--yet nothing of the kind ever developed. There was an interesting, if bizarre, set up involving owls and plates and mysteries, but *fzzzt* it completely fizzled out. Nothing was ever explained and that ending... What kind of an ending was that? There was no resolution, no explanation, nothing that rewarded the reader for investing their time and interest in the book. Frankly, I can't understand how this won any awards. While the narrative did have a sort of poetic flow to it, the dialogue was occasionally disjointed and the character interactions were just...off. The whole book was off. Where was the great and tragic love story that was supposed to plague this particular Welsh valley and play itself out generation after generation? No love story ever came onto the scene, except for an old one involving one of the character's mother and another character's uncle, but even then we don't get much of the story. The entire book didn't make one whit of sense. As I started it, when I was still fairly excited about it and the characters were searching for clues, I thought to myself, "Huh, this kind of compares to Susan Cooper's *Over Sea, Under Stone*." As I continued reading, though, that comparison flew right out the window...just like those damned paper owls from **The Owl Service**.

Sara Saif says

My God, this book is weird.

Not only did I not like the insufferable vagueness and the "shrouded in mystery" vibe, I also couldn't synchronize myself with the dialogue which is SO odd. The book is short and I'm not sure if it works in or against its favor. I got the general idea of the myth explored in there but the rest just feels like the aftermath of an explosion; shards everywhere, smoke and haze and utter helplessness. Like, WHAT EVEN is going on?

I don't know how old the three characters were. I didn't know until one-third of the book that who was who and why were they in the valley. I don't know how three people were supposed to have endured/passed/fought the 'curse'. I don't know what happened at the end. That's it. You just don't know anything because the book refuses to tell you anything.

I have so many questions like how much did the people of the valley know about the tale of Blodeuwedd, what the hell went wrong with Gwyn, what did Huw mean when he said that 'she' was hunting? I tried watching the TV adaptation which turned out to be a colossal mistake. 1960's television. *shudders*

The atmosphere is haunting and a bit mystical. But it's not fleshed out in my opinion, whether unintentional or by design, I don't know and I don't care. I was relieved that it ended quickly but disappointed with the fact that it gave me so little.

Isobel Robertson says

This is perhaps my favourite novel of all time. It's strange, mysterious, confusing and haunting. I inherited my mother's childhood copy, and I think it says a lot about the timeless quality of the book that I loved it as much in the 1990s as she did in the 1970s - and still love it today. Although marketed as a young adult book, this is actually a very adult book in many ways, and can certainly be enjoyed by much older people.

As a huge fan of Celtic mythology, I love the subtle way in which Alan Garner uses the story of Llew and Blodeuwedd. This isn't a retelling of the story, or anything like it. It's an exploration of the way powerful events can affect people through multiple generations.

It is also a beautiful illustration of how important place can be. I have explored the role played by the setting of the Owl Service elsewhere, but I still think it's worth repeating just how closely tied the book is to its landscape. This is a fantastic interpretation of a Welsh myth that has managed to stay close to its cultural *and* geographical roots.

Phrynne says

Sometimes along the way you find a really special book in a very unexpected place. The Owl Service is something I picked up to satisfy the requirements of a challenge and I am so pleased I did! It is a remarkable book.

I would classify this as a children's book written for adults because it would need to be a very smart child to understand even half of what is happening. One of the criticisms often thrown at authors is that they do too much tell and not enough show. Well Garner is an author who does not worry about telling at all. Nothing is

explained but everything can be understood if the reader listens carefully enough to the dialogue and the story.

And it is a very scary story. Characters are compelled to do things they do not understand. Objects are smashed by unseen sources. There are noises in the roof. When one character attempts to leave the village he is forced back by unnatural events. There is a sense of danger throughout the whole text. If I had read this as a child I would not have slept for weeks!

Alan Garner is a very skilful author. I loved the way the mother only ever made her presence felt by proxy. She was all pervasive to the story but never actually in the room. And the ending, which I see many people do not like, was amazing. Events culminated as they do at the end of a story and the author just stopped. No explanations, no follow up. Just the end. Sometimes it is really good to read something so refreshingly different.

Sarah Hale says

I will admit I didn't 'get' this book the first time I read it. In fact it was not until the third or fourth reading that I really began to understand the plot and central themes. It also certainly helps if you have read the story in the 'Mabinogion' that this book is loosely based upon. Garner's economical style is also an initial obstacle. Reading through some of the reviews here, I can see that some people have found fault with the fact that he almost completely omits description of any kind in this novel; very little information is provided about how the characters feel. The reason why I kept re-reading this book is directly because it doesn't reveal its mysteries easily. It keeps them close to its chest, and the reader must make an effort to uncover them. Indeed, the novel is almost exclusively made up of dialogue. It certainly can take several reads of a conversation to work out that one of the characters is angry, or upset. There are none of those usual clues that authors normally provide to help their readers understand precisely what's happening. In this way I like to think of the novel as pseudo-play, akin to Shakespeare; lines of dialogue followed by minimal direction. And it is exactly this level of economy that makes the book work; the reader's confusion mirrors that of the main characters. They are just as much lost as we are.

Garner's sparse style also helps to build up an unprecedented level of tension that I have never since encountered in a supposed "children's" book. There are some parts of the book that are decidedly unnerving; the scratching in the ceiling, Alison's rage causing books to fly, Gwyn creeping through the eerie forest at night, being stalked by indeterminate streaks of light, the painting of a woman surrounded by flowers whose petals are made of claws. It all comes together to create a story that makes your skin crawl.

It is difficult to describe this book. When I was asked at work what my favourite book was, without hesitation I replied 'The Owl Service' by Alan Garner. And yet when they asked me what it was about, all I could say was 'Well, it's about these three young people... on holiday in Wales... and they get caught up in a Welsh myth...'. And I suppose that's because on the surface, not an awful lot happens. And yet, in between nothing happening, everything happens. And that is precisely what makes this book so wonderful. There are so many layers, it's hard to know where to begin. Most obvious is the class conflict, coupled with English vs Welsh antagonism - Alison, Roger and their parents are English, and upper-middle class, while Gwyn and his mother are Welsh, and working class. The relationship between Alison and Gwyn causes reverberations within the perceived social hierarchy, to devastating effect. Then there is the mother-child dynamic; Roger, Gwyn and Alison all have difficult relationships with their mothers. In fact they are all neglected by their mothers in one way or another; Roger's (the 'Birmingham Belle') by running off with another man, Gwyn's by deserting the village and Alison's by being there but never really there. The sense of space and location; you get the feeling that this story happens because of the place that the characters inhabit. The Welsh valley

they are caught within is almost a character within itself. Then there is the love triangle that threatens to engulf each generation, and lastly but most importantly, there is the eternal presence of the chillingly powerful force of nature. The characters have no will other than what nature dictates. Gwyn cannot escape the valley despite his best efforts; he is driven back by torrential rain and hounded by dogs. Alison feels compelled to trace the owl patterns from the plates, and hides them in the forest. Roger photographs the trees on the hill through the hole in the Stone of Gronw, and unwittingly captures a figure, holding something aloft...

There is one passage in the novel that in my mind completely encapsulates the main theme of the book:

'What is the power?' said Alison.

'I can't explain', said Gwyn. 'I once saw a nettle growing in an old garage in Aber. A pale little thing it was. It had split the concrete floor.'

This then, is what drives this book; the unstoppable power of nature, against which human beings are nothing but playthings.

Beth Bonini says

I know this book is considered to be a fantasy classic, but I found it surprisingly difficult to read. Let me be specific: it doesn't take LONG to read, but it is hard to follow. There is a lot of dialogue, and the language/vernacular already seems archaic even though the book was written in the 1960s. Also, it is very elliptical -- both in terms of the language and the plot.

Most of my reading at the moment is geared towards my teaching; so as I read, I'm constantly evaluating whether or not I can "use" a particular book. Will my students like it? is always my underlying question.

This book has LOTS of atmosphere and suspense, and I liked the way the ancient Welsh legend plays out in both the present generation and the one just before it. But would it appeal to modern 12 year olds? I rather doubt it. Indeed, it seemed more like an adult book to me. The class and English/Welsh tensions are one of the most notable aspects of the story, and I think that the 40 years which have elapsed since this book was published have totally changed that particular landscape.

Kailey (BooksforMKs) says

I've liked some of Alan Garner's other books, but this one was just confusing. Most references to time are left out, like "The next day..." or "hours earlier...", so you have no idea what is going on, until you realize halfway into the characters conversation that this must be the next day, or they must have moved to inside the house now b/c this wouldn't make sense if they were still outside. He just leaves you guessing.

I do not understand any of these characters. Every word they say is so confusing, and I can't tell if they're joking with one another or if they're serious. Sometimes there are no helpful descriptions, like "Roger laughed." Then just when I think I have someone figured out they turn into someone else. Much like life, I suppose.

You never see Alison's mother at all. She's this invisible non-entity that everyone is afraid of upsetting. I like that artistic touch of never actually meeting her, but she has a definite influence on every character. Well done!

Many of the jokes or references may be Welsh things or British sayings that I just don't know. Perhaps that accounts for some of the confusion. I think I could have enjoyed this story more if it had just been clearly written. I really like the idea of the story and the way it moves, but nothing is ever explained.

I have no idea what happened at the end. It just ends and I don't get it. Are the feathers magically gone? Is Allison okay? Is she dead or an owl zombie or is she turned into flowers? Is she back to her normal self? Are they still fighting? Why did they act like that, but not try to kill one another at the stone with the hole or whatever? Is Roger going to be a photographer? Is Allison going abroad? Is Gwyn going to work in a shop? Where did Nancy get to? Don't know.

Nick Swarbrick says

I am coming to dislike the blunt instrument of the four-star review. This is a haunting book, begging all sorts of questions about the author and his relationship with landscape and legend. It is, for me, maybe not Garner's finest, but four stars because it is not the great novel that is Thursbitch or the complex writing of Red Shift seems mean-spirited.

Owl Service sits - perhaps uncomfortably- on the cusp of a new kind of writing , as YA becomes a genre in its own right. However, that edge is a place where Garner is free to invent, to try out how narrative works, in ways that are more challenging than the first two Weirdestone books. It is in consequence able to explore its big themes alongside teenage attraction, jealousy, class, and a whole load of other issues as part of the jumble of growing up, in much the same way as Red Shift does, but situated itself deep into a Celtic landscape and legend-cycle. On my first read, I abandoned it half-way to get The Mabinogion from the central library, before returning to finish it, and this is its Garner trademark: that the "original" story of magic and jealousy is a powerful driving force for Garner's narrative.

This is not to say that The Owl Service is a footnote to the story of Blodeuwedd in Welsh mythology- Garner is too skilful a writer for that - but that themes are revisited, half represented and half enacted differently - as the story of the local boy Gwynn and his relationship with incomers Roger and Alison becomes enmeshed in stories from their families' pasts in an isolated, even claustrophobic valley in N Wales. Garner, It seems to me, is exploring what happens when, unthinking, we blunder into a set of past stories, whether these are the stuff of legend or our own family stories. If the ending is abrupt and ambiguous, the story is nonetheless compelling, and the subtexts stay with me, maybe even as an adult reader. Four stars? Not really - but how do you rate this kind of complex thinking?

Kerry says

Written as I begin...

She wants to be flowers but you keep making her owls.

This will be a paraphrase rather than a direct quote, as it's something I've always remembered, almost been haunted by, over the years since I read Alan Garner's The Owl Service as a child. Every so often, that evocative phrase would bubble out of my subconscious and I'd think of it for a moment before going back to my everyday life.

She wants to be flowers but you keep making her owls.

Despite that deep memory, I've never reread the book. I was searching the shelves in the library a week or

two ago, looking for books for Marcus, when I saw this edition sitting on the rack. I picked it up pretty much without thinking and checked it out on my card rather than his. I didn't know if I'd read it, but that line floated up again and that's why I brought it home.

Then I started making up a book pool for *Once Upon a Time VII* and it seemed only sensible to add this to it. Before I knew what had happened, I realised it was going to be my first book for the challenge. It's either based on, or a retelling of (I can't remember which since I read it so long ago) the story of Blodeuwedd, a Welsh tale from The Mabinogion and now I've written this introduction, I shall go and read it. I'll report back when I'm finished.

=====

Okay, so I finished this 10 days ago and I still haven't come back to finish my review. That's because I don't quite know what to say.

I have found myself with two reactions to this book. One is a response to the words on the page, and I find myself very disappointed to say that it didn't hold up to my memories of it. BUT, and this is the strange thing, my emotional reaction remains the same. What I have carried away from the book remains magical and I don't quite know why.

The prose is actually very sparse. You are thrown into the story without much - or really any - introduction to the characters or the setting. Immediately, Alison is hear scritchings in the ceiling and Gwyn is looking into it and finding the plates. Bang, off we go.

There's a good bit of back-story that really isn't fully spelled out. It isn't always clear exactly what is happening and sometimes the story jumps ahead, straight into the next bit of action without transitioning you there. It also ends abruptly, as soon as the threat is done, with no wind-down or investigation into the consequences of what has just happened.

And YET...

Garner works some kind of subtle magic I totally don't understand, so that the reader seems to pick up all those missing pieces by osmosis. And the result is that while I noticed those things while reading, once I was finished, the magic was back and I found myself loving the book all over again.

I don't know what it is. I don't know how he does it. But it works.

However, I may choose not to read the book itself again, and instead hold the glow of the story to myself like a warm and pleasant memory where some of the magic comes from the blurring of the actual experience.

Rebecca McNutt says

The Owl Service is the kind of classic-style middle-grade fantasy novel that schools should have on its shelves instead of just *Twilight* and *The Hunger Games*. With its imagination, mystical story and creative characters, it's a wonderful book that you'll never forget.

Leah says

A tightly-written, intense little novel that belies its childlike exterior.

After reading the first two books in the Weirdstone of Brisingamen trilogy - more on the third later - one could be forgiven for considering Alan Garner a bit light on the characterisation end of things. Susan and Colin were, after all, little more than boy's-own-adventure tropes masquerading as children in the countryside.

But this would be a serious underestimation of Garner's skills with tone and scenario. He says in his postscript that the idea for this story came to him posed as the question: 'What would happen to three people who were forced to live together, despite having little in common?', and it seems fairly obvious that jumping off from this point has driven his characterisation in a strong and determined direction. The three youths belong to the great 'what-ho!' English legacy of Enid Blyton, but they made a lengthy stopover in the sly and callous territory of Evelyn Waugh.

In short, these are child-characters for grown-ups. They are *horrible*, in one way or another, genuinely nasty and vicious and snide, and then the next minute vulnerable or hilarious or kind. They are uncomfortable to spend time with, because they are uncomfortably like us. Garner's scenario pays off excruciatingly well: we find ourselves slowly stripped of the false notion that these people know, or even *like* each other, and discover that beneath the surface lies a tension that simmers between class, expectation, and desire, which frequently erupts into hateful words and irreversible actions.

Sound a bit heavy for what has always been marketed as a children's book? Fear not! There's also a groundskeeper who *might* be thousands of years old, a flock of invisible owls, a mysterious motorbike and a myth that comes back to haunt the valley. Garner touches lightly on all these points, dipping into one, then another, never overdoing it or laying it on expositionally thick. A brushstroke here, a pencil line there, and before you know it a sketch forms behind your eyes, done with nothing more than a few choice lines of dialogue and some sparse description.

All these elements of storytelling are familiar to me now, having read Boneland, the third Weirdstone book, which is told almost exclusively in short, sharp bursts of dialogue and feverish internal monologue, and yet somehow manages to paint a vivid, dreamlike picture of the story. Although The Owl Service is not quite there yet, the potential clearly is, and Garner lightly weaves a tale of murder, myth and madness to create something truly unique and unforgettable.

Becky Schneider says

I read this hoping I might be able to write my Celtic Literature paper on it; it ended up not being a good fit, but it was still a pretty interesting novel. It centers around the brief friendship of two English teenagers with a Welsh boy their age. The depiction of Welsh-English hostilities was the strongest thread of the novel; Gwyn, the Welsh boy, is a great character and his story is subtle but heartbreaking. There was also a very cool contrast between the social realism and the fantasy elements (which were all straight out of Welsh mythology.)

What makes this book especially quirky is the style; it's very sparse, occasionally to the point of being confusing, and is generally very elliptical in terms of storytelling. On one hand, this was kind of cool, but I was already being plunged into an unfamiliar place and time, so the effect was somewhat overwhelming.

Generally I felt like I was peering into a world that I didn't belong in. This is a cool experience, but I never quite got comfortable in it.

Nikki says

The Owl Service is a very, very powerful book. It used to scare me silly, when I was younger -- under ten, probably -- and it still has a very tense feel to it, an edge of fright. It draws on the story of Blodeuwedd, from the Mabinogion: Gwydion makes her out of flowers, to be a wife for Lleu Llaw Gyffes, who has been cursed by his mother never to marry a mortal woman. However, she falls in love with Gronw Pebr, and they plot how to kill Lleu. He is only changed into an eagle, though, and he comes back and eventually kills Gronw, and Blodeuwedd is turned into an owl in punishment.

The central idea of The Owl Service is this story replaying over and over again in a Welsh valley -- that the story has so much power that it can't help but keep replaying itself like a traumatic memory. And in the book it's mapped onto a fraught story of conflicting loyalties, class difference, the problems between the Welsh and the English... the power of it comes from how much of it is real. I can believe in the anger here, in the characters' feelings.

Alan Garner did, as far as I can gather, an amazing amount of research for this book. I think he succeeds in putting his finger on Welsh feelings and retelling the myth in a respectful and even renewing way.
