Give Me Moor

Myth, Magic, Madness and Mating Rituals in Cornwall

*Zennor Spirit of Place*, Bob Osborne (Rebel Not Taken Publishing)

Bob Osborne's new book – published in a limited edition of 666 signed copies – is a gloriously ridiculous compilation of the facts, fiction, rumours and possibilities that inform this small area of North Cornwall. Osborne relies on gossip, hearsay, folk tales and hunches as much as historical and literary evidence to compile 23 chapters alive with occult narratives and hidden desires.

Osborne is obsessed by coincidence and synchronicities. Somebody's love affairs are as important as leylines to him, and the fact that different writers lived in the same house, albeit at different times, must mean something. Of course, the fact that these writers include D.H. Lawrence and Aleister Crowley, not to mention a whole host of poets, artists and visitors from London, means there is plenty to write about and for the reader to ponder on.

Virginia Woolf and the Bloomsbury set put in an appearance, as do the artists Francis Bacon, Karl Weschke, Bryan Winter and Anthony Frost (reminiscing about his father Terry Frost). 'The Zennor Romantic Poets' or 'Moor Poets' are described as a 'collection of misfits', people are driven from the county on suspicion of being Nazis, the villages and lonely hamlets are full of reports of covens and orgies, magic rituals, and King Arthur returns as a wild-haired pensioner in fancy dress to claim an iron-age fort as his own and anoint Osborne 'The Earl of Tregerthen'.

Everyone, it seems, sleeps with everyone else and is prone to bouts of serious drinking or drug-taking, dressing up, occult rituals and alleged espionage. However, despite their busy lives, some still find time to paint or write: Patrick Heron, Sandra Blow, W.S. Graham, Karl Weschke, Margo Maeckelberghe and Sandra Blow all feature here.

Osborne is clearly fascinated by all this stuff, and regards Lower Tregerthen Farm, which seems to be his current abode, as one of the epicentres of whatever it is that is going on and has previously gone on. (The others are Zennor Quoit and the house nowadays known as Eagles Nest.) The book is a crazy assemblage of would-be-communes, decadence, obsessions and all written with apparent suspension of belief: Osborne clearly believes in magic, incantation and sexual energy, or is keeping a very straight face anyway.

Cold reason suggests that there have been a lot of seriously deluded and idealistic people over time in the Zennor area, and close reading reveals that there's a lot of implied and possible connections here that don't bear much scrutiny. It's a kind of hippy revisionist history of the area, a version of what might have or could have happened if only idealism, magic and folklore had been taken seriously. Or it might just be a case of people inventing their own entertainment in a place where's nothing much else to do.

Either way, this is a fascinating pot-pourri of nonsense set in Cornwall, all wrapped around real places, people and images, although I was somewhat put off the whole thing when some brief online searching reveals that Osborne is a conspiracy theorist spreading lies and disinformation about vaccines, digital currency and 'the great reset'. Still, anything is possible it seems, if you believe it.

Rupert Loydell

(548 words)