

MORAG MACINNES, HER *DOGGS*

Who are these creatures? Where did they come from? At first I thought they were dogs, but now I'm not so sure... Perhaps, once upon a time Morag did dogs, nice, endearing conventional dogs, opening the door of the conventional gas-fired kiln and finding them there, wagging their tails to be let out. If so, somehow they have gone out of control, and somehow manipulated the hand of their maker in order to become what they think they ought to be. They've done away with the nice doggy stuff, the moony look, the soft furry head to be patted, and they have transmuted themselves, pared down to their essence.

They certainly didn't think much of the predictability and quality control that comes from a kiln; instead, being creatures of fire and earth anyway, they wanted to get down and dirty, and stagger, scorched and stained from a fiery pit in the earth itself. And that's the way they are: these creatures are not cooked with the flick of a switch and the spin of a dial - first of all Morag fashions them according to their whims, then she digs a pit in the stony earth high in the Montes de Málaga. In the pit she lights a fire of brushwood and logs, and when the fire is burning fiercely she piles it with rocks. The tribe of waiting creatures, honed and burnished by now with arcane tools of obsidian and jet, and studded with stones for the teeth and scales, are led to the furnace and careful arrayed upon the rocks. Finally the most delicate covering of brushwood to protect them, and the whole thing is buried beneath a mound of earth. There they stay for days, entombed with the simmering fire (don't try this at home, folks; you need special permission for a start).

You can imagine the excitement of opening the pit: the baked earth and the ashes are gingerly cleared away and the newly created creatures come tumbling forth. Standing in gaggles in the cool open air, they groan and giggle and howl and bark. They are somewhere between what their creator intended them to be, what they wanted to be themselves, and what the pit made them... a bit like us, really.

They're the craziest of creatures, scorched by fire and smoke, howling at some ancient moon – for they give the impression that although they're just out of the pit, they've been around for a lot longer than we have. Theirs is a random mix of anguish, fury, sadness, resignation, longing and love... but all tinged with a snigger and a giggle, a big helping of humour. They are the raw spirits of earth and fire, household gods, loyal companions on the road... and by some cunning shift they've made it over the hills to Grazalema.

Chris Stewart