

ANGELA TOPPING

The New Generation

Angela Topping is a freelance poet with twenty years experience as an English teacher. She was Head of Literacy and Oracy at Upton Hall School until 2009. Her poems have been widely published, are used in verse speaking festivals all over the world, and feature in textbooks and on the internet education sites of various organisations including Amnesty International and Oxfam. Her work has been selected for use by The Samaritans and The Open University in educational resources, and also appears in examination anthologies. She is a seasoned poet-in-schools for The Poetry Society and Windows Project, Liverpool. She has mentored many young writers and has tutored creative writing courses for all age groups. Her poems have been performed in a wide range of venues including The Greenbelt Festival, Manchester Poetry Festival, and The Bluecoat Arts Centre Liverpool.

Also by Angela Topping

Dandelions for Mothers' Day (Stride 1988
and 1989)

The Least Thing (editor, Stride 1989)

Making Connections: A Festschrift for Matt Simpson
(Editor, Stride 1996)

The Fiddle: New and Selected Poems (Stride 1999)

The Way We Came (bluechrome 2007)

Focus on Spies by Michael Frayn (Greenwich
Exchange 2008)

*Focus on The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories by
Angela Carter* (Greenwich Exchange 2009)

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*To my husband Dave, my daughters Laura
and Rosie, and members of Upton Hall School
Writers' Club*

'Encourage youth and it will blossom.'
Celtic Proverb

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WITCH IN THE SUPERMARKET

There's a witch in the supermarket over there
after Fowler's treacle for her flyaway hair,
buying up nail-varnish — black or green?
Rooting in the freezer for toad ice-cream!

There's a witch in the supermarket next row on
asking where the Tinned Bat's Ears have gone,
mutters, 'Why do they always change things round?
Mouse Tails and Rats' Tongues can't be found!

There's a witch in the supermarket down that aisle
searching for something to blacken her smile.
She's a trolley full of tins for her witch's cat
who simply swears by Bit-O-Bat.

Times are difficult and Bovril has to do
instead of newt's blood for a tasty stew;
sun-dried bluebottles crunchy and sweet,
desiccated spiders for a Hallowe'en treat.

There's a witch in the supermarket at the till
scribbling her cheque with a grey goose quill!
There's a witch at the checkout, look, mum, quick!
Piling up her shopping on a big broomstick!

BABA YAGA AND KATIE WEIR

And I must play the witch for them again,
cackle a croaky voice that makes me sore,
stretch fingers into bony claws to beckon with.
No one can do it quite like me. I act,
enjoy their screams when I pursue.
They're letting me join in, and for a change
it's me against them. Success is brief—
their stronger magic, longer legs outwit.
I'm left to bite on this—the thought
of that sour old woman's house
they always cross the street to pass.

A WIZARD TEACHER

Mr McAlpine's a wizard!
I know 'cos I saw an owl
staring out of his window
when I passed by his house.

Those funny books he carries
walking round the school—
well, I caught a glimpse of one title
WIZZOGOGIGOOLE.

His hair's done in a ponytail.
My dad thinks that is weird.
He's got very bushy eyebrows
and a wizzy fizzy beard.

The gnomes he has in his garden
move around from day to day
sometimes they're all in a huddle
and you can hear the things they say

moaning about Mr McAlpine
and the work he makes them do.
They should try his number work—
it's the hardest in the school.

I quite like Mr McAlpine —
he knows how to tell a good tale.
He's told the class about Merlin
and knights that wore shiny mail.

He says that in the summer term
we'll all go on a trip
and see the cave at Alderley Edge
where King Arthur lies asleep.

I pity the other poor teachers
they really can't compete
with Mr McAlpine the wizard
when he magics us a treat.

THE NEW GENERATION

Wizards look like everyday folk
despite what you've been told.
We don't have long white whiskers
nor are we very old.

We don't go round in trailing robes
except on special days;
those pointed hats are stylish
but out of the usual way.

We don't wear silver stars and moons
embroidered on our clothes;
we never wear those pointy shoes
they're murder on the toes.

I like to wear my Levi's,
roar up and down the street
on my Ducati motorbike,
Doc Martens on my feet.

I'm part of a new generation
of wizard girls, we're cool!
No one dares to mess with me.
Female wizards rule!

AUNT JANE

My Auntie Jane is a funny old stick:
She's been alive for ever.
She likes to wear a long black dress,
a hat with a raven's feather.

Her skin is pale like marble,
her teeth are gleaming white,
her eyes are hard to fathom
She'll go out only at night.

She chooses crimson lipstick,
pointed shoes upon her feet,
her hair is swept up high.
I've never seen her eat.

I'm not allowed to visit her
without my mum and dad:
she has some quaint old habits:
my friends think she is mad.

Her house is quaintly spooky.
It's old fashioned, dark and cold.
She hugs me very tightly,
I can't escape her hold.

The New Generation

She always keeps the curtains drawn
and does not like the light,
there's not a mirror to be seen
for she claims she looks a sight.

She tells me how she loves me
she'll eat me up, she cries,
what pointed teeth my auntie has
what terrifying eyes!

My parents say it's time to go
and wrap me in my coat
they take such special care to tie
my scarf around my throat.

They say Aunt Jane's eccentric
and is better left alone
with her spooky castle of a house,
her bed carved out of stone.

MER-MUM

She holds a silver-backed mirror
as she brushes her long dark hair.
Her sea-green eyes grow hazy
as she croons a mournful air.

She likes to swim in the ocean
every day when I'm at school
and in the summer evenings
she rests in the goldfish pool.

She wears her pearly earrings
her skirts fall to the ground
and as she glides along the floor
the scent of seaweed's all around.

I love my mermaid mummy
and I know that she loves me.
I dread the day that she decides
to go back to the sea.

MIDSUMMER NIGHT

Madness, my nan says.
But I want to go
out in the dark
looking for fairies.

I'm sure they'd
come when I call
or if I tiptoe
I might just

catch them at
their revels
dancing in a ring.
I know where

the ring is.
Grandad told me
to watch where
bluebells grew.

MY OLD MAN

My old man's a pilot.
He steers a big starship.
He wears white plastic trousers
and his food comes through a drip.

My old mum's a robot.
Her joints are made of tin.
She's covered with washable velvet
and she answers to the name of Lyn.

My teacher's a dalek.
He has a boring voice.
He likes to wave his wand at you
and exterminate the boys.

My sister's an alien.
Dad found her growing on Mars.
She won't touch peas and carrots
'cos she lives on chocolate bars.

My friends think I'm peculiar
because my ears are green.
If they saw what I turn into
they'd scream and scream and scream.

SATANIC SUPPLIES

Live toads
Slimy livers
Crossroads
Blood givers

Velvet bats
Pilots' thumbs
Pointed hats
Mouldy crumbs

Grimoirs
Salted leeches
Eyes in jars
Skin of teachers

Broomsticks
Wart creams
Candles — black wicks
Recorded screams

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THEY MEAN BUSINESS

Better beware on the London Tube
for in amongst the crowds
disguised as office workers
are sinister beings in bowler hats.
Inside their leather briefcases
their wands are folded up.
Those files of accounts and orders
are really wicked spells
encrypted in numbers.
On their laptop computers
they contact other wizards
and conspire over plans
for world domination.
They mean business.
Look at their shiny shoes!

DEAR SPIDER,

Thanks for the invitation
to your cosy dinner for two.
I'd really love to come
but I can't think what to do.
I can't decide just what to wear
my clothes are all so fine
and I'm not certain where to find
a suitable sort of wine.
I'm not used to dining out,
it's really not my thing.
I tend to snatch my meals
when I am on the wing.
My mealtime conversation
is limited in kind.
In short I feel that
I really should decline.
It's not that I don't like you
but we are so far apart;
I can't see it working out
although you want my heart.

Yours sincerely,
Fly

CAT'S PRAYER

Dear Whiskered Lord,
thank you for your creation of birds
(but why did you give them wings?).
Thank you for mice and the human
who gives me food when I'm too tired
to go hunting. Thank you for milk.

And now I've praised you I can ask
let there always be milk and warmth
and these daft humans for servants.
Keep back the dog who barks and
anything that might spoil my slumbers.
In the name of fur, Amen.

THE PRAYER OF THE RABBITS

Hail human, full of treats
water is with you.

Blessed are you among rabbit mothers
and blessed is your warm hand
when you stroke us. We like it when you croon
soft songs to us.

Take us not to the vets with her sharp needles
but bring us hay forever and ever.

Amen.