**16-19 Critical – Highly Commended**

**Erika Yip, Milton Academy: ‘Girl to Snake’**

‘Girl to Snake’ by Abigail Parry is a dramatic monologue that flirts with the fine line between innocence and corruption, just as a child would during adolescence. The poem depicts a young girl compelled towards corruption and away from innocence. She seeks the help of Ropey Joe – a snake with skills to deceive her parents – to introduce her to knowledge of the world. This conversation alludes to the Bible, where a snake offers Eve an apple from the tree of knowledge. Although knowledge is depicted as a sin in the biblical story, the playful and hopeful tone of the poem suggests otherwise. The poem poses an essential question that battles with society’s ideals – is the loss of innocence necessarily a negative thing?

The speaker starts with a cautious tone, still keeping in mind her parents’ warnings about Ropey Joe. However, she succumbs to her desires and appeals to the snake. The rapid transition between ‘we’re not supposed to parley, Ropey Joe. I’m meant to close my eyes and shut the door’ and ‘I’ll be here. And I’m all ears – there are things I want to know’ symbolizes the speed with which children mature. In addition, the speaker’s play between sweet and sinful imagery and the irregular rhyme scheme reinforce the idea that true innocence can only be retained in fragments. ‘Oh tell me tell me tell me about absinthe and yahtzee’ includes two opposing forms of entertainment – strong liquor and a children’s dice game – signifying a development in more adult interests. The rhymes do not follow a specific pattern either, reminiscent of an incomplete nursery rhyme. The poem thus melancholically expresses the losing of childish means of expression.

In many ways, the stories in the Bible shape our everyday beliefs. Parry challenges the story of Adam and Eve, however, by alluding to this scene but leaving the future of the speaker’s fate undisclosed. There is a sense of hopefulness and curiosity in the last line ‘there are so many things to know’. This ambiguity suggests that she might turn out fine – even if she repeats the actions that led to the exile of Adam and Eve from the Garden. Apart from uncertainty, the language in this poem also illuminates the dark beauty of corruption. By juxtaposing ‘sugar skulls’ with ‘ginger’,’lighting’ with ‘furies’, and ‘ligatures’ with ‘diamonds’, the speaker discloses a frightening truth – there will always be corruption when there is innocence.

The speaker accepts the link between degradation and latent maturity. With its obvious allusion to the Bible, she subtly disputes its ideals without directly opposing scripture. Just like everyone, the speaker is a child born and grown of society’s standards; however, she dares to accept corruption as a natural course of human life. Her courage inspired me to re-examine the information we are fed daily and to realize that there are multiple truths to every story.