

## Arden Reads: *Dark and Deepest Red* by Anna-Marie McLemore

This latest novel from author Anna-Marie McLemore, follows two timelines more than 500 years apart. In Strasburg during 1518, a dancing fever broke out and Lavinia (Lala) Blau's family was blamed for it. Women dance through the streets until they collapse, and magic and witchcraft is at its center. 500 years later, a town's annual "glimmer" (an enchanted haze that spreads through the town and creates miracles) brings with it a more morbid curse. Rosella Olivia dances through the streets and Emil—a descendent of Lala's family—must recover the secrets of his heritage to save Rosella.

*Deep and Darkest Red*, packed to the brim with diversity, featuring latina, romani, and trans main characters and multiple, queer background characters, sets a new standard for YA and shows the importance of representation in young adult books. The author explores themes of discrimination and family, both of which are timeless and relevant in fiction and real life. Both main characters face discrimination due to their heritage and origins, and transphobia is also present in the novel. This is an important issue to discuss in a young adult novel because it shows teens the importance of acceptance and representation, and this is one of the reasons I highly recommend this book.

One aspect of this novel that took me by surprise was the seamless combination of history and fantasy. McLemore bases their story off of the real-life dancing plague of 1518, and flawlessly weaves true historical events with magical and fantastical elements. The fantasy component of the novel creates a vivid and beautiful narrative while the heart of the story lies in its authentic and real-life themes. The one weakness to this novel is its short chapters with multiple perspectives. Just as I was beginning to get sucked into a character's narrative, I found myself ripped from one timeline and thrown into another. It was difficult to attach myself to the characters when I only read from their perspective for brief, three or four page intervals. However, this weakness also has a positive side. This is the perfect book to read if you find it hard to pay attention, as the quick changing of perspectives and timelines creates a fast-paced read. The winding and non-linear plot keeps the reader on their toes, and provides background and depth to every scene without giving anything away. Overall, I strongly recommend this book to anybody who enjoys fantasy with a touch of realism, and is looking for a book that easily sucks you in to its imaginative story and magical descriptions.