

## ARDEN READS: *Poisoned* by Jennifer Donnelly

I am always eager to read a fairytale retelling but the many retellings that have passed through my bookshelves have set a high standard for my fairytale needs. I find the recurring problem with fairytale retellings is often their predictability and lack of originality. I was interested to pick up this book and see how the author would take Snow White's story and make it her own. *Poisoned* by Jennifer Donnelly does not disappoint. I was surprised to find that she added depth to the story and crafted characters with dimension, rather than the flat characters that we often see in older stories. In Donnelly's retelling, Snow White is not a helpless little girl. Rather than waiting for her Prince to come, she sets out on her own adventure to find him. But when she does, she realizes that he is not looking for her, and she must save herself.

When it comes to specific elements of the novel, *Poisoned* has it all. The main character, Sophie, greatly surprised me, with both her exceptional depth, backstory, and strength as a protagonist. I appreciated the differences between Sophie and the original Snow White, and Sophie's character arc and traits make it clear that Donnelly made a conscious effort to change the message of Snow White's story. No longer is it a story about waiting around for your prince, but instead, it's about independence and strength as a woman. This is the perfect novel for young readers, especially young women, because it emphasizes the fact that to be strong and to be courageous does not mean to hide the qualities that make you vulnerable. By presenting a main character that not only rejects her role as a damsel in distress, but who finds strength in her vulnerability, Donnelly shows younger readers that vulnerability, empathy, and love foster strength.

Even the secondary characters of this novel brought more to the tale. Each of the seven brothers were both entertaining and heartwarming, and I greatly enjoyed the relationship formed between Sophie and her "found family". As the story began, I immediately connected with these characters and my love for them was only strengthened when the cast of characters grew over the course of the story. While the beginning of *Poisoned* has a great hook and still is packed with entertainment and intrigue, I believe the story only gets stronger as it progresses, and the end was absolutely the high point for me. I was impressed with how effectively Donnelly wrapped up the story and how she tackled concepts such as fear and death by personifying them. I feel that the message the ending gave contributed greatly to the overall theme of the novel, and made me want to reread the entire book in order to see it from a new perspective! Overall, this was a beautiful novel in that it was complex enough to convey important messages about love and strength, but simple enough that it can be understood by all ages. I would recommend *Poisoned* to all lovers of fantasy or to any middle school reader who is looking to dip their toes into the realms of YA.