



The Renaissance Club

Rachel Dacus

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Would you give up everything, even the time in which you live, to be with your soul mate? Those are the stakes for heroine May Gold in this time travel novel, *The Renaissance Club*. May, a college adjunct, often dreams about the subject of her master's thesis—Gianlorenzo Bernini. In her fantasies, she's in his arms, the wildly adored partner of the man who invented the Baroque. But in reality, May has just landed in Rome with her teaching colleagues and older boyfriend. She considers herself a precocious failure and yearns to unleash her passion and creative spirit. Over the course of the tour, she realizes she has to choose: stay in a safe but stagnant existence or take a risk. Will May's adventure in time ruin her life or lead to a magical new one?

The Renaissance Club Details

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From Reader Review The Renaissance Club for online ebook

The Vagaries of Us says

See the original review at <https://thevagariesofus.com/2018/01/2...> -- Included is an excerpt from chapter 3!

The Renaissance Club is a standalone time-travel novel written by Rachel Dacus. The story follows May, a young woman who joins her boyfriend and other art scholars on a tour through some of the more famous art hotspots in Italy. The tour is guided by George, an older man with the secret ability to leap through time. George, seeing May's passion in all things Bernini- a famous sculptor and playwright from the seventeenth century- hands her a "hall pass" for time leaping. This hall pass sends her careening into a fortuitous meeting with her inspiration and art idol- Bernini himself.

Thus begins an emotional and introspective journey for May as she finds her love of Bernini's art shifting beyond what he can create, to what he has awoken within her. Bernini in all his arrogant and passionate glory helps May become confident in her writing and poetry, embraces her passion for art and history (especially as it is centered around his creations), and does not disparage her desire for children (as her boyfriend Darren is often doing throughout the novel). In kind, May centers Bernini by directing his passions towards his art, rather than the lives of others (for example, he could have dwelled on the betrayal of his brother and Constanza, but May was there to help him see through this difficult time). Bernini and May inspired each other, and eventually, this inspiration grew into a passionate and sweet love.

I enjoyed following the Renaissance Club's journey through the soft, rolling countryside of Assisi, the stone city of Florence, the canal ways of Venice, and the ancient and history-rich Rome. If you are a great lover of art and history, or even a fan of Italy itself, then this would be a novel you enjoy. The landscape was a fluid thing in this novel which made it intriguing. I loved seeing where we would be taken next- and especially loved not knowing when May would be thrust back into time and into Bernini's arms. I enjoyed embarking on this journey with May and had worried a few times about how she would solve the problem of maintaining a relationship with Bernini, while not altering history in any way. In this, I was not disappointed! The ending left me pleased- as the solution to this problem was as creative and enlightening as the rest of the novel.

Alyssa Palombo says

This was a wonderful and fun book to read while traveling around Italy, which is exactly when I read it :) An interesting premise well-executed.

Amy says

The Renaissance Club is undoubtedly one of the best books I've read this year. I am a huge fan of time travel stories, but this was unique for me because I've never read a book that is set in the Renaissance Period in Italy. When Fiery Seas Publishing offered this book to me, I was so excited because I am a huge history nerd (and a history major), and I absolutely adore learning about the Renaissance, so needless to say I jumped straight into this book. Before I get into specifics, I just want to say that I read this book twice, back to back,

because I loved it so much.

Possibly the best thing about this book is the writing. Rachel Dacus describes the setting in such luscious and vivid detail that it's almost a shock when you look up and realise that you're not in Italy. In terms of the story itself, the romance felt natural and didn't feel like it was forced on you, and the characters were interesting and offered unique experiences of the world around them. As you're reading you feel the emotions of the characters, and you are completely immersed in the settings. This book is so incredible, and it really is unique. I will remember this book for a very long time.

For anyone who is interested in either history or art (or both!) this is a must read.

Kathy Davie says

A, so far, standalone novel following a group of college professors as they tour the art history of Italy.

I received this story from the publisher, Fiery Seas Publishing, LLC, via Instafreebie.

My Take

Dacus uses single third person point-of-view using May's perspective and focusing primarily on her passion, her fear. About those influences that attack your own sense of rightness, terrifying you into following someone else's vision of your life.

It will be a fascinating journey, one that I wish Dacus had spent more time on in providing greater depth, showing us what causes this group of tourists to change as they do. We only see May's and Eva's interactions, and even those aren't all that convincing. It's more *tell* than anything.

Still, I did fall in love with *The Renaissance Club*, for Dacus' turn of phrase, for her poetry (and I *hate* poetry!??!!), for her insights on art, for the evolutions in art, for those great quotes:

”This was beauty in service of a cruel faith that turned terrible persecution into its symbol of love.”

Dacus' passion for the Renaissance came through quite clearly and definitely made me want to book my ticket for Italy right now! What Dacus says about Cosimo de Medici's Library and what Michelangelo introduced in creating it. Wow. And yet more tidbits on the various artists who helped art to evolve, expand. And I had to laugh about “the constant need for entertainments”. Our time doesn't need all the physical events Bernini speaks of...’cause we got TV and the Internet. Hmmm...

Yep, there's plenty of bickering amongst the professors, each trying to one-up the other, but a few were much worse. Eva was just plain nasty. She was so angry at everything and so negative about everyone. She simply couldn't resist tearing at everyone. Darren is another jerk, always aiming for the “correct” political move to make and such a child in his reactions. *Wait'll you read what Darren thinks of the Apollo and Daphne sculpture...oy...*

Of course, May turned out to not be a whole lot better. What a weaseling, judgmental woman! She wants to, she's afraid, she thinks she should stick to the humdrum, she...whine, whine, whine. She makes promises she doesn't keep. She tries to railroad Darren. Again. As an historian, I can't believe how quick May was to want to change Bernini's future. I mean...what the heck?

I gotta say I didn't buy Eva's time reactions; I would have expected more skepticism from her. Especially the way she jumped on George for using the present tense in discussing the past. Although, lol, George did have some excellent responses to her snark.

There's plenty of conflict in this: the years of negativity from May's parents (and everyone else — she is wimpy); Sandra's anger at her parents; Darren's childishness; Eva's bitching; Norman's worries about his daughter (and his own wimpiness and planning obsessions); and, Bernini's own conflicts.

"[Rome] is pure melodrama, meant to intimidate the sinner and bind the believer."

I did love how supportive Bernini was of May. If only there were more people who could be so upbeat and positive.

"Her head emptied its thoughts into the pillow."

There's an interesting conflict in those of the group who see beauty as a lie, mostly due to their own issues, and others who appreciate beauty as truth. There was a fascinating bit from Bernini about "truth resid[ing] in the ideal, not the actual" with May realizing that [Bernini's] kind of beauty didn't cheat truth or realism. It heightened it." *How can you not love that?*

I absolute DO agree with Eva about how non-painters overcomplicate the art. Sure there are some painters who want to make a statement, but most artists simply need to create whatever image is in their heads.

Then there's May's realization about what Bernini uses to "speak of the human condition". Just beautiful.

Just a couple more niggles... There were a number of sentences that made no sense. I don't know if author/publisher was in a rush or was overtired, but hoo-boy.

I just KNOW Dacus has set this up for a series. And I do hope she writes the next one quickly! ...in spite of all my whining.

The Story

May Gold, college adjunct, often dreams about the subject of her master's thesis — Gianlorenzo Bernini. In her fantasies she's in his arms, the wildly adored partner of the man who invented the Baroque.

But in reality, May has just landed in Rome with her teaching colleagues and older boyfriend who is paying her way. She yearns to unleash her passion and creative spirit, and when the floor under the gilded dome of St Peter's basilica rocks under her feet, she gets her chance. Walking through the veil that appears, she finds herself in the year 1624, staring straight into Bernini's eyes. Their immediate and powerful attraction grows throughout May's tour of Italy. And as she continues to meet her ethereal partner, even for brief snatches of time, her creativity and confidence blossom. All the doorways to happiness seem blocked for May — all except the shimmering doorway to Bernini's world.

May has to choose: stay in her safe but stagnant existence, or take a risk. Will May's adventure in time ruin her life or lead to a magical new one?

The Characters

May Gold is the Baroque-loving daughter of documentary makers, parents who are firm believers in fact, not fancy, "crushing [their] daughter's joy in creating". She is currently a part-time teacher at the college under threat of a layoff. **Dr Darren Perl** is a self-obsessed senior professor of history and May's boyfriend.

Dr George “Giorgio” St. James has always been different, traveling back in time even as a child. These days he is a history scholar who teaches at various universities, leads tour groups, and helps people who have an affinity for the past. **Timmy** was his best friend in fourth grade. **Mrs. Smith** had been an angry grade school teacher. **Dr Maria Donato** is **George**’s high-speed substitute in Florence. **Signora Scutto** is the curator of Palazzo Fondazione in Rome.

The Renaissance Club is...

...a group of college professors, their spouses, and friends who take a tour of art and art history in the Italian Renaissance. **Norman Wesley** is the dean of **Mount Antioch College** and the club organizer. His wife, **Kathleen**, organized the trip. **Sandra** is their angry daughter. **Dr Iris** is a friend of Kathleen’s and more interested in Italian clothes. **Eva Manookian**, May’s boss, is the head of the Art and Art History Department, who paints when she’s not teaching. **Arthur** is her very one-dimensional husband who teaches English literature, heads up the English department, and plays guitar. **Rebecca** was their daughter who died of cancer three years ago. **Rick** is head of the Information Technology department and married to the gorgeous **Marianna**. **Becca** is the drama instructor; **Daphne** is her sister. **Jake Ismail** is a friend and colleague of George’s and currently working at the college.

Vico is the Italian shoe salesman who sweeps Sandra off her feet. **Pépé** is a fabulous chef. **Dr Frank** is a therapist Eva has seen before. **Brother Leo** is with the **San Francesco del Deserto** in Venice.

Italy, 1624

A sculptor, architect, and playwright, **Cavaliere Gianlorenzo Bernini** is a Renaissance artist whose ideas ushered in the Baroque era of art. **Matteo Bonarelli** is Bernini’s newest assistant; **Costanza** is his wife. **Finelli** was an amazingly delicate carver and another assistant. **Luigi** is Bernini’s traitorous brother.

Donna Olimpia Maidalchini was the mistress of **Pope Innocent X**. **Prince Niccolo** connives with Bernini. **Cardinal Scipione Borghese** had been Bernini’s best patron and a friend; his home is now a museum. **Giotto** was a shepherd who discovered perspective.

Some of George’s historic acquaintances include **Solon**, **Thomas Jefferson**, and **Zheng** who invented pasta.

The Cover and Title

The cover is glowing around May’s body, partially submerged in a Venetian canal, her long dark, curly hair descending midway down her back, as she faces away from us, staring into the pink and gold city of Venice, a cloud of butterflies flitting overhead in the dawning sky of pinks, purples, oranges, and yellows. The title is centered just below May’s hair with a text separator beneath with the author’s name beneath that in a distressed olde worlde parchment-textured serif font.

The title is the ongoing conflict, *The Renaissance Club* tour group of professors and art lovers.

Elena Mikalsen says

A perfect time-travel story, full of romance and Italian travel. Don’t miss this one!

Jennifer Klepper says

THE RENAISSANCE CLUB is a time travelogue of Italy for poets, dreamers, artists, and romantics. Only a poet-novelist could write a book that captures both the lyrical force of main character May Gold *and* her desire to find her place in the world and in Time. Rachel Dacus has already established herself as a published poet. This beautiful debut promises a future of combining that talent with stories that give readers an escape into the worlds she creates.

Jane McFarland says

I loved this book! I have always dreamed of visiting Italy, mostly for the food, but am now just as excited to go and experience the art!

Dacus provides beautiful descriptions of architecture, paintings and sculptures as she leads us through a tour of various cities. She brings the artists and sculptors to life in ways that allow us to better interpret their masterpieces - what they felt, what they thought, what they desired when creating them.

The tug of war between May's relationship with Darren and her seemingly impossible romance with Bernini keeps you engaged throughout the book. I found her struggle to find where she belongs in the world very relatable! Wouldn't we all love the chance to go to another place and another time, and try to rewrite the past?

This book was a quick and easy read, and one that any lover of art, travel and romance will enjoy!

Augustine of Elsinore says

For more reviews, author interviews and book news check out my personal blog:

<https://inkandpapercuts.wordpress.com/>

I received Rachel Dacus's ARC in exchange for an honest review.

Rachel Dacus's "The Renaissance Club" comprises a unique conglomeration of historical romance and time travel imbued in Italian allure. Set in Italy, it guides the reader back and forth between eras and art movements in order to narrate the story of the Renaissance Club—especially of one of its members, the young and promising May Gold.

I must admit that reading this novel was fun and enjoyable even if, ultimately, I realized that it fell short of my own expectations. Dacus has an incredible writing style; the ARC I received was impeccable in grammar, diction, and syntax. The author seems to be an expert in handling English with care, and she exhibits a deep knowledge of figurative speech and manners of speech.

Moreover, I fancied the way the story enveloped but I think that there was not adequate justification for the reason time travel occurred in the first place. Also, the fact that a student was in love with a Renaissance painter did not strike a chord with me. The plot is extremely romantic both in terms of the erotic interests lurking but also in terms of May; she has to surpass a number of obstacles, namely her own insecurities if she is to establish dominance in her own field of expertise.

I have evidently grown out of time travel romance and this is the reason why the novel did not satisfy me.

Perhaps, one of the strongest characteristics of Dacus's work is her excellent language and the optimal editing by the publishing house. Even if the novel does not take stock of the myth of time travel and its connotations of fantasy as it should have, the romance is sufficient to drive the whole storyline—one that is definitely not poorly developed or loosely created.

Bernini's life story also drives the plot, but I failed to understand the reason I was to enjoy Renaissance history in conjunction with some type of romance that seemed unjustified. As another reader pointed out, the novel is a travelogue of Italian art and poetry, and I am adding: of impossible romance both chronologically and sensibly. Unfortunately, I am not such a fan of either of these.

VERDICT:

At the end of the day, "The Renaissance Club" consists an enjoyable and addictive romance novel which enchants the reader with Italian notes and instills on them a fervent admiration for Italian art. A great choice for readers of romance and light fantasy.

Neg Dardashti says

The author takes us on an amazing journey through Italy, giving us glimpses into the art world of past and present. Her poetic writing weaves us into the scenes, making the reader feel as though they are on the journey with May, her main character. Her interaction with the artist, Bernini, is deep and relevant in helping May discover herself, and establishing the person she knows she wants to be. Not only does this timeless story keep you up in the late hours of the night, but it makes you want to take your own trip to Italy, with the hopes that you may also be a member of the Renaissance Club. Definitely, a must read!

Suanne says

Author Rachel Dacus in *The Renaissance Club* captures the frenetic activity of a three-week, multi-city art tour of Italy with a group of art historians and artists known as The Renaissance Club. Dacus's protagonist and other tour members whiz through museums so fast the art works blend together.

Dacus's protagonist, May Gold, is an adjust professor at a third-rate school, living with an older lover, also an art historian. May wrote her thesis on Gian Lorenzo Bernini, the golden child of the Baroque period: architect, city planner, painter, sculptor, and writer/director/set designer. May fantasizes about being Bernini's lover. On this tour, she learns that time is not always linear and has folds that people can walk in and out of. Slipping through one of these folds, she encounters Bernini, falls in love with him, and seriously considers leaving the 21st century and settling in the 17th.

I enjoyed *The Renaissance Club* immensely. I lived in Italy for several years and have seen the art works and the museums, etc., that Dacus captures so well. Like the members of the club, in the company of an art historian spouse, I've stood in awe before Michelangelo's David and Bernini's Martyrdom of Saint Lawrence. Thus I can verify that Dacus's art historical/travelogue perspective is excellent. She captures the essence of Rome, Florence, Venice, and other cities the tour visits.

Less compelling, however, is the romance between May and Gian Lorenzo. Their time together during these folds in time is minimal and not really enough to fully develop their relationship.

In short, if you enjoy art and travelogues with an Italian bent, you'll enjoy *The Renaissance Club*. If you are expecting a full-blown, steamy romance, you'll be disappointed.

Maddison Michaels says

What a great story!! I loved how effortlessly the author transported me to Italy, both past and present, and as a reader I was fully immersed me in the art and culture of the Renaissance period (in such a wondrous way). Reading this book was an absolute delight for my senses. I thoroughly enjoyed the main character Maya, who was wonderful and I was so invested in her journey. This was a lovely debut, and I'm really looking forward to future books by Rachel Dacus!

Diane says

If you've ever wanted to travel to Italy, or you've ever wanted a different past or future, or you believe in a life lived full-out, you will want to read this book. It's a wonderful read as we explore the world of art in Italy and get to know the sculptor Bernini the way the protagonist, May, does. I found myself relaxing as I read this poetic book and, for the first time, wanting to go to Italy.

Suzanne says

Readers of *The Renaissance Club* will discover an enchanting world of riches—not only in the gorgeous setting of Italy, but in the discussions and descriptions of art, particularly with regard to Bernini and Michelangelo. Dacus, an accomplished poet, showcases her talent with prose that evokes the lush beauty of the art and landscape of Italy's finest. That, alone, is worth reading this imaginative, time-traveling tale of a May Gold, a young woman caught between the present and the past.

George, the mysterious tour guide of *The Renaissance Club*, understands the ability to fold time, allowing May the actual experience of living in the Renaissance during random slices of time. She quickly becomes the lover of Bernini—the topic of her master's thesis and the object of her obsession. Bernini's passionate nature (in all things) influences May's previous acceptance of her modern-day troubles, giving her the comparative insight to see her situation through a different lens. First, there is her boss, Eva, a distasteful woman who heads the university Art Department and who takes great pleasure in putting up roadblocks to stall May's career. And then there is Darren, a tenured professor at the university and May's boyfriend, who is such an unlikeable character I was aching for May to blast him out of her life.

May learns, as many of us do, that change happens when we are able to step outside our lives long enough to realize that what we accept as “the way things are” isn’t the way things have to be.

Beautiful story, beautifully told, and the perfect way to escape to Italy—with an author who captures the country and its artistic treasures with expertise and poetic flair.

Cathy says

The author uses the story of May's travels around Italy with the other members of The Renaissance Club in an imaginative way to give the reader the story of Bernini's life and work without the book ever feeling like an art history textbook.

May's relationship with her boyfriend, Darren, is strained and what she experiences during her journey through Italy only seems to make their differences more apparent. Although May feels gratitude towards Darren for bringing her on the trip, she feels frustrated at his unwillingness to commit to their future together. They seem temperamentally very different as well. He is ambitious and status driven, whilst May is more interested in exploring her creativity through writing poetry. When Darren remarks dismissively, "There's not much money in writing poetry, is there?" May's understandable reaction is to think his comments 'eminently reasonable, but not exactly encouraging'.

At one point, initiated by Darren, they indulge in an academic debate over lunch about who was the better sculptor – Bernini or Michelangelo. To my mind, the discussion that follows encapsulates the tensions in their relationship – it's an argument loosely disguised as academic debate. No surprise that Darren puts the case for Michelangelo, dismissing May's adored Bernini as "a mere entertainer...a vaudevillian who equates art with spectacle...a showoff." May soon works out what's really going on. 'He was demolishing her idol with a savage analysis. This wasn't their usual game. This was a fight. She felt as if he were acting like a jealous lover.'

May, and her boss, Eva, both find their creativity awakened by their experiences on the tour. For Eva it is getting up close and personal with the greatest Renaissance art, as represented by Michelangelo, that brings about this change and offers her the possibility of moving on from tragedies in her personal life. For May, it is the master of the Baroque, Bernini, who gets her creative (and other) juices flowing. Her creative outlet is poetry, the medium in which she can most effectively express her feelings and emotions.

As a reader, I felt almost transported to the various artistic sites The Renaissance Club visit on their tour thanks to the author's wonderful descriptions of church interiors, frescoes and sculptures. There are also some evocative descriptions of the cities the group visit on their tour: Rome, Siena, Assisi, Florence and Venice. For example, this description of Rome: 'Ancient city walls next to rough-piled medieval palazzos, Egyptian obelisks rising from Baroque fountains. Rome was a hot mess of beauty.' (I love that phrase 'a hot mess of beauty'. If you've ever been there, you'll realise how apt it is.) Or this description of Venice: 'White-domed churches shouldered next to palazzos of earthy colours, and the filigreed palaces, with fluted chimneys and Juliet balconies, were jewels against the blue sky. Venice was the gaudy inheritance of a rich empire built on water, imagination, and bold ambition.' The author also writes poetry and I got a real sense of this in some of the imaginative phrases and metaphors in the book. For instance, as May feels herself slipping between past and present: 'The city kept doing this to her, zigzagging through its eras so fast she had time-whiplash.'

I really enjoyed The Renaissance Club and found much to admire in it on a number of different levels. I loved the imaginative use of the time travel aspect to provide an insight into Italian art of the Renaissance and the Baroque without feeling that I'd sat through a lecture on art history. I enjoyed seeing the awakening of May's creativity and the effect on her of Bernini's energizing presence: 'I need to learn to flow. Why do I always feel like I'm encased in stone?'. And I found myself applauding the changes she decides to make in her life. As the group's remarkable tour guide, George, says, "Your life is yours to create, May. Shape it like a poem, with imagination but also sense".

I received an advance reader copy courtesy of publishers, Fiery Sea Publishing, in return for an honest and unbiased review.

Jenn Bradshaw says

I love doing ARC reviews for Fiery Seas Publishing, and their most recent release of *The Renaissance Club* was no exception. Another stellar story and subtle romance! Rachel Dacus' story weaves the past and the present together in a seamless blend of prose and poetry, with subtle undertones reminiscent of a fine Italian culinary dish.

This was not my first time-travel romance, but Ms. Dacus is easily on par with my literary heroine, Diana Gabaldon. While the heroine travels back and forth through time, she tries to keep her present-day, dead-on-arrival, relationship with Darren together; but each trip through the portal of Time, each liaison with her artistic hero, Bernini, she finds herself comparing past and present in more ways than one.

The romance between May and Bernini sizzles, and the love scenes are subtle, but pack a punch and the author moves deftly through the full range of human emotions with style and sensitivity. All the while, Dacus is describing art and Italy with a deftness that leaves even the least-experienced art historian with a clear mental image of what the characters are seeing and studying.

Her characters step in and out of time seamlessly, and it would seem that all of our intrepid travelers on this particular three-week academic tour find themselves somehow changed by the magic of Italy; its pull an irresistible dare to be something more, fly higher, try something new, inspired by the innovation in artistic styles that Rome, Venice, Florence, and Assisi seethe with. And who wouldn't find themselves forever altered by meeting Masters of their time such as Michelangelo, Bernini and Borromini?

Even those who aren't romance fans will find something in the pages of this book to pique their imagination. Aspiring authors, poets, painters and sculptors especially, should read at least the first three chapters, and pay special heed Bernini's advice.

You won't find steamy sex scenes in this book, but in this reviewer's opinion, they would have most likely detracted from the overall impact of Rachel's work. Readers will be left with a new appreciation of art, history, love and time itself. A must for every romance reader's book list, especially fans of time-travel romance.
