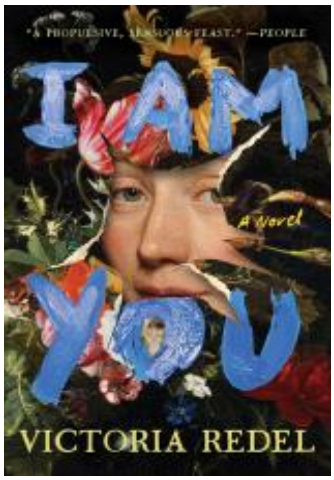
I Am You

by Victoria Redel



About the Book

This ?lush, sexy, absorbing novel? of historical fiction ?brings to life two artists who are inextricably linked in passion and competition? (Melissa Febos, bestselling author of GIRLHOOD).

A ?captivating? lesbian romance set in the ?wonderfully atmospheric? art world of 1600s Amsterdam (Sarah Jessica Parker, SJP Lit).

At eight years old, Gerta Pieters is forced to disguise herself as a boy and sent to work for a genteel Dutch family. When their brilliant and beautiful daughter, Maria, sees through Gerta?s ruse, she insists that Gerta accompany her to Amsterdam and help her enter the elite, male-dominated art world.

While Maria rises in the ranks of society as a painting prodigy, Gerta makes herself invaluable in every way: confidante, muse, lover. But as Gerta steps into her own talents, their relationship fractures into a complex web of obsession and rivalry --- and the secrets they keep threaten to unravel everything.

A mesmerizing historical novel, I AM YOU is a meditation on gender, an ode to artistic creation, and an unforgettable love story that reimagines the life of renowned still-life painter Maria van Oosterwijck during the Dutch Golden Age.

Discussion Guide

1. At the top of the novel, Gerta remarks, ?I was happy to be Pieter.? How does this initial statement manifest throughout the novel as Gerta begins to develop into an adult, lover and painter?

2. How does the impact of memory present itself throughout the novel? How do Gerta?s memories of the past shape her relationship to the characters around her, as well as her perspective at large?

3. Maria often refers to Gerta as ?Pieter? even after she realizes ?Pieter? is actually a girl in disguise. How does this inform Gerta?s actions or behaviors once they establish themselves in Amsterdam? How does this influence Gerta?s idea of herself?

4. What are Gerta and Maria?s first impressions of young Jacobus, and why do you think they differ so widely?

5. What sort of influence do the men in the painter?s Guild have over Maria and Gerta socially, politically and professionally? How does this influence the trajectory of the novel?

6. Midway through the novel, Gerta transitions in her duties as maid from grunt work to a more elevated status, where she?s able to hire another maid to attend to household duties. What does this transition signify? How does this influence Gerta?s self-perception and decision-making?

7. Maria often orchestrates public acts of humiliation towards Gerta. Why do you think she does this? What do these acts tell us about Maria, and how do they influence Gerta?s ultimate act of betrayal?

8. How does Jacobus? initial act of violence reverberate throughout the novel? How does this manifest through Gerta?s actions towards others and herself?

9. With the onset of Maria?s disability, the power dynamic between Maria and Gerta shifts in a fundamental way. How does the nature of this dynamic shift and evolve over the course of the novel?

10. What do you make of The Ultimate Act? What does it say about the nature of Maria and Gerta?s relationship? Does the aftermath seem a fitting end for our cast of characters?

Author Bio

Victoria Redel is a first-generation American author of four books of poetry and six books of fiction, most recently PARADISE (2022). Her latest novel is I AM YOU. Victoria?s work has been widely anthologized, awarded and translated in 10 languages. Her debut novel, LOVERBOY (2001), was adapted for a feature film directed by Kevin Bacon.

Redel?s short stories, poetry and essays have appeared in *Granta, The New York Times, the Los Angeles Times, Bomb, One Story, Salmagundi, O* and *NOON*, among many others. She has received fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation, The National Endowment for the Arts and the Fine Arts Work Center. Victoria is a professor in the graduate and undergraduate Creative Writing programs at Sarah Lawrence College and lives in New York and Utah.

Critical Praise

?I loved I AM YOU in a way that?s different from other books I have loved. Victoria Redel masterfully evokes the rich period of Golden Age Amsterdam and the centrality of its artists. Against this vivid and brilliantly detailed backdrop, the story of a female painter and her assistant comes to life, captivating us with its insights on time, art, sexual politics, class, women?s rights, and how we tell and retell our histories. It is spellbinding, wonderfully atmospheric, and impossible to forget.?

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