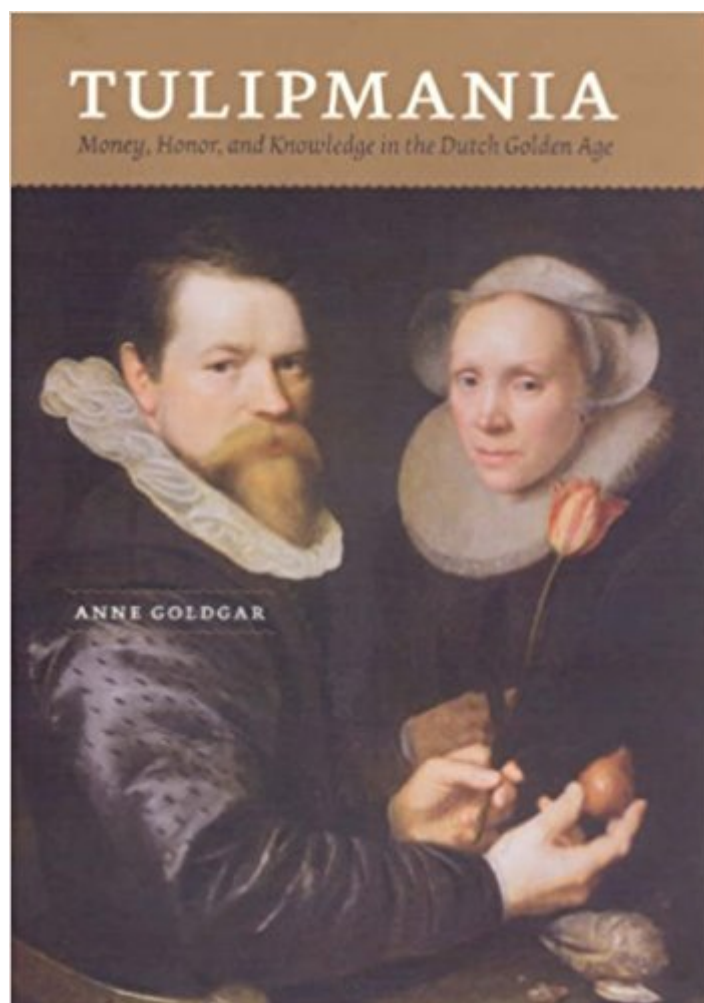


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Tulipmania: Money, Honor, And Knowledge In The Dutch Golden Age



Synopsis

In the 1630s the Netherlands was gripped by tulipmania: a speculative fever unprecedented in scale and, as popular history would have it, folly. We all know the outline of the story—how otherwise sensible merchants, nobles, and artisans spent all they had (and much that they didn't) on tulip bulbs. We have heard how these bulbs changed hands hundreds of times in a single day, and how some bulbs, sold and resold for thousands of guilders, never even existed. Tulipmania is seen as an example of the gullibility of crowds and the dangers of financial speculation. But it wasn't like that. As Anne Goldgar reveals in *Tulipmania*, not one of these stories is true. Making use of extensive archival research, she lays waste to the legends, revealing that while the 1630s did see a speculative bubble in tulip prices, neither the height of the bubble nor its bursting were anywhere near as dramatic as we tend to think. By clearing away the accumulated myths, Goldgar is able to show us instead the far more interesting reality: the ways in which tulipmania reflected deep anxieties about the transformation of Dutch society in the Golden Age.

“Goldgar tells us at the start of her excellent debunking book: ‘Most of what we have heard of [tulipmania] is not true. . . . She tells a new story.’” —Simon Kuper, *Financial Times*

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Customer Reviews

“Tulipmania is in every way a model of historical scholarship, an exemplary piece of historical craftsmanship. Every page is rife with rich human detail, and Goldgar's lively and

elegant style carries the reader, enthusiasm and curiosity undimmed, to the stimulating conclusion. Above all, this is revisionist history of the best kind. (Anthony Grafton, Princeton University)"This is wonderful book, beautifully written and sustained by archival scholarship of the highest order. Its devastating and original demolition of the myth of Tulip mania, the fineness of historical judgment and the painstaking reconstructions so effortlessly conveyed on the page make it a pleasure to read." (John Brewer, author of *A Sentimental Murder: Love and Madness in the Eighteenth Century*)"Anne Goldgar's scholarly sleuthing gives a whole new look to the 1630s tulipmania in the Netherlands. The bulb buyers and sellers were good middle-class merchants, not so far removed from knowledgeable connoisseurs and art-lovers. The crash in prices undermined not the economy, but people's confidence in honor and good judgment. Delightfully written, *Tulipmania* turns the exaggerations of a media event into an exploration of early modern values and anxieties. (Natalie Zemon Davis)"In this handsomely illustrated volume. . . . Goldgar provides a rich survey of the historiography of early modern European cultural and financial history along with a detailed account of the rise of tulip connoisseurship and trade. Some readers may find her interpretation that participants in the tulip market were motivated more by connoisseurship and honor than pursuit of gain to be overly subtle, but most will be impressed by Goldgar's thoroughness in examining primary sources. Highly recommended." (Choice)"Goldgar tells us at the start of her excellent debunking book: 'Most of what we have heard of [tulipmania] is not true' She tells a new story." (Simon Kuper *Financial Times*)"A standard reference for all historians whenever they deal with this episode in Dutch financial history." (Larry Neal *EH.Net*)"What Anne Goldgar does in her provocative and lively new book is convincingly cast all of these existing narratives into questions. Drawing on extensive research in a wide range of archives . . . she shows that the tulip boom, far from representing a case of mass irrationality, was actually the product of intellectual, familial, and commercial networks among a relatively small and prosperous subset of Dutch burghers. . . . [The book] serves not only to rewrite a fascinating historical event, but to shed considerable light on the history of early modern commerce and culture more generally." (Alix Cooper *Renaissance Quarterly*)"A brilliant young spoilsport of a historian . . . decided to examine the evidence rather than buy the legend. . . . This book is a gem. Elegantly and lucidly written, it debunks the myth of tulipmania once and for all." (Richard Mawrey *Historic Gardens Review*)"In my view it is a wonderful and delightfully written book offering a totally new slant on the tulipmania in the Netherlands in the 1630s, when the bottom dropped out of the tulip bulb market in just a few days' time." (M.M.G. *Fase De Economist* 2008-02-12)"A meticulously researched study of the phenomenon that challenges all of the

previously held ideas about the extent of this bubble. There can be no doubt that this well-written and engaging book will become the standard reference on the topic for years to come." (Donald J. Harreld H-Net Reviews)"Goldgar's book establishes a new benchmark--the first since 1637--for interpretations of the tulip mania. It largely fulfills its ambitious interdisciplinary agenda, bringing to life the world of the seventeenth-century floristes." (Jan de Vries American Historical Review)"As Anne Goldgar gently informs us in the beginning of her absorbing book, most of what we 'know' about tulip mania is pure fiction." (Ingrid D. Rowland New Republic)2009 Leo Gershey Prize from the American Historical Association (American Historical Association Leo Gershey Prize)"Goldgar persuasively demolishes most of the myths and exaggerations surrounding this affair. . . . [She] treats it as a microhistorical lens through which we can learn much about the society and culture of the young Dutch Republic. . . . Cultural history at its best." (Christine Kooi Sixteenth Century Journal)"Goldgar's research can hardly be bettered. . . . [The] book is the most authoritative study on the subject and it will be the statutory starting point for fresh research." (Karel Davids The Historian)"Goldgar's examination of the role of value and the new ways social status, trust, and expertise interacted in judgments concerning value in a mercantile culture should have important repercussions for the history of science, art, economic thought, social history, and studies of the emerging public sphere." (Vera Keller History and Philosophy of the Life Sciences)"Goldgar's book is much more than just a deconstruction of popular myth in history; it is a magnificent reconstruction of the mentality of the upper middle class in the Dutch Republic. . . . A fascinating and indeed convincing reconstruction of the tulip craze. It is well-researched, beautifully written and splendidly produced." (Klaas van Berkel European History Quarterly)

Anne Goldgar is reader in early modern history at King's College, London. She is the author of *Impolite Learning: Conduct and Community in the Republic of Letters, 1680-1750*.

This book reads like a college text you had to read for an exam. An interesting topic for me as I was traveling to Holland. If it were written by my favorite author of nonfiction. John McPhee, it would have been a winner. I skimmed through it and couldn't wait until I was finished. Lots of information if you are truly interested in the 17th century tulip trade and not a dilettante like me. The mania for bulbs is often likened to our stock market crashes and internet crazes. The epilogue called "Cabbage Fever " is most interesting so I will give this tome 3 stars.

Many people talk about bubbles. Few will spend time to look into details. This book alone digs in depth.

It is definitely a college-level textbook for a European History or a Netherlands History class. Save your money and read it from the library. The rating I gave it is for the scholarship and not the readability. I expected more from the large number of illustrations included--very, very few had tulips in them!

After reading *Tulipmania*, I feel that the book could have been better than it was. Goldgar claims that she used firsthand sources that no one else has used to study the topic of Tulipmania before, allowing her to draw conclusions that no one has previously done. Essentially, Goldgar questions the traditional interpretation throughout history of Tulipmania, particularly the effect that the crisis actually had on Dutch society. Even though these new sources shed new light on the topic, I felt that the book could have been delivered in a much better way. Goldgar quickly becomes bogged down with the minutia of the tulip trade. She did talk about overall trends; however, I think the book would have been much more interesting if she didn't spend as much time writing about individual transactions or individual meetings between buyers and sellers. These are necessary to establish the validity of the argument, but I think that the book would be more enjoyable with a few less of these examples. The book also could have been improved with some overall statistics about Dutch society at the time. For example, (without giving too much away) claims about the economic conditions in the Netherlands during the early 17th century could have been backed up with more than just assertions from the author. In addition, the book does not spend a lot of time on some key issues, particularly, why the prices suddenly collapsed. This may have been out of the scope of the book, and the author does state that the issue is extremely complex and has no easy answer. But I think it would have added to the book to spend a bit more time discussing a few of the possible reasons. This is not to say that the book had no positives. Simply by looking at new primary sources, the author has done a great service to anyone interested in Tulipmania, the Netherlands, or early modern Europe. Goldgar uses actual records from the transactions that took place at the time, rather than the pamphlets written by third parties at the time of and shortly after the crash in tulip prices. The author put a lot of research into the book, using those records to come up with an extensive list of buyers and sellers within the tulip trade. By doing this, she develops an accurate image of who was involved in the tulip trade and how far reaching the trade was into society. Another strong point of the book was the description of Early Modern Dutch society. An entire chapter is

dedicated to art in Holland at the time and how that relates to tulips and other collectable items in Dutch society. The book also draws a number of interesting conclusions about how business was conducted in Dutch society. As the title suggests, money, honor, and knowledge were all very important themes in the Netherlands. The last chapter and the epilogue were the most interesting parts of the book to me. It is here that the author begins to use the enormous amounts of detail to draw some conclusions about Tulipmania. She explains why Tulipmania was thought to be of such great economic performance, why she feels it was not, and why she feels that the effects of the event were distorted. The epilogue ties everything together with a discussion on values and knowledge within a society. I recommend this book if you are interested in Tulipmania and/or the Netherlands during the early seventeenth century. However, be prepared to slog through minute details to get to the good stuff.

Is Tulipmania a good book, I was left wondering after having finished it. I guess to ask this question is to answer it. Still, by researching the tulip trade in the Dutch Golden Age, Anne Goldgar hit on archival gold. A massive amount of previously ill researched primary source material is combined with an impressive body of secondary literature. She combines insights from both historians and art historians. And with this wealth of material, Goldgar tells a concise and insightful story. As a nice topping, on every other page or so the book displays plates an illustrations from the period. But very often, one is left slightly baffled by Goldgar's train of thought. One is more or less ready to follow Goldgar when she argues that well-to-do Dutchmen liked to have collections tulips and shells because both could be linked to the (apparently) highly-esteemed marble. Of course, there is no way of knowing whether this was true, but the connection is interesting. When from there on, she starts a discussion on the "soul-like" qualities of pets and tulips in paintings opposed to paintings of cars and shells, she is clearly off the mark. Irritatingly, in books like these, Michel Foucault is never far away. When two neighbours in a neighbourhood of merchants have an informal chat about the price of tulips at their doorstep, in Goldgar's words they strengthen hierarchies of knowledge within constrained physical, cultural and commercial boundaries. And when these people go to the baker to buy a loaf of bread and discuss flowers over there, the customer, the baker *and* the bakery all may be identified as (being in the centre of) nodes of information. As for the historical narrative, despite all the insights of Tulipmania, I thought many themes were left ill explored. For example, what struck me, is that paintings depicting only tulips are hard to find. Did the "bloemisten" then really only engage in tulips as Goldgar suggests? In 1600, tulips were largely a matter of a European elite dominated by botanical specialists like Clusius. In

the 1630's, it seems as if a shift occurred to the Dutch burghers. Did the academical world entirely vanish? Moreover, I thought the quantitative material was not presented very convincingly. Goldgar claims statistical correlation in the geographical spread of "bloemisten", where really I could see none. And unfortunately she chose not to include tables to present her statistics. Finally, I was frankly disappointed with the last two chapters in which Goldgar isn't able to make much of the judicial source material, fails to explain the "futures trade" convincingly, and is repetitive on many occasions. I suppose that these and other issues might be explored in future histories on tulips in the Dutch Golden Age, for which Goldgar's "Tulipmania" will be a mandatory starting point.

For those interested in 17th century Dutch art, this is an excellent resource. The author's research is outstanding and many misconceptions regarding the topic of Tulipmania are corrected and clarified.

A really interesting read, debunking a lot of myths but still leaving the reader with a lot of insight into society and culture in the Dutch Golden Age. Read my full review at [...]

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