

# The Golden Tulip Short Guide

## The Golden Tulip by Rosalind Laker

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# Characters

Filled with a mixture of historical figures and fictional characters, *The Golden Tulip* reflects the life and times of the people in the seventeenth century in Europe and the Netherlands. Laker's careful research into the time period is brought to bear on descriptions of the historical and the fictional people and their feelings and reactions to the problems of the period.

Jan Vermeer was a Dutch master painter.

He was born in Delft in 1632, "near the zenith of an era that saw the Dutch nation lift itself into prominence as one of Europe's great powers," according to *The World of Vermeer*. Acknowledged today as a true master in a period filled with masters, Vermeer was not well known in his lifetime outside of his own city and did not leave many paintings or drawings. He seems to have led a quiet life in the house where he was born. His father was an inn and tavern keeper. After Vermeer married, he fathered eleven children. Little else is known about his personal life, and only about forty of his paintings survive. *The World of Vermeer* says he was ". . . dealing with subjects familiar to the people and reproduced by the artists of his time, nevertheless added to these commonplace objects a luster and significance purely his own that made the scenes seem, after all, extraordinarily different. . . .

Vermeer saw and recorded better than any painter of his time the precise appearance of objects as they are defined by light and space."

In *The Golden Tulip*, Vermeer is chosen to be the teacher and mentor for Francesca because her work shows that she is trying to learn to use light to define the objects she paints. Vermeer is noted for his use of light and his exacting portrayal of objects. The few facts that are known about Vermeer's life are fitted into the framework of the story to enhance the believability of the fictional characters. Vermeer is brought to life as a loving family man and a patient teacher. The descriptions of his house and its position on the square in Delft are historically correct, and the paintings attributed to him are acknowledged to be his work by critics in today's art world. His use of yellow paint to define light and the other colors described in the novel are historically accurate. Aletta is allowed to train with him only for a short time before his death, in keeping with the time frame of Vermeer's life. Vermeer sponsors Francesca's work before the Guild, even when she is unable to be present because she is being held in prison. The Guild later recognizes her as a master, in a ceremony held after she is released.

Francesca Visser and her sisters, Sybylla and Aletta, have grown up in a family that celebrates the freedom of choice found in seventeenth-century Dutch culture. All three girls are given the opportunity to become artists under the tutelage of their father, a master painter. Francesca and Aletta want to become masters, discussing and planning ways to get the necessary money for their apprenticeships. Sybylla is more interested in finding someone wealthy and handsome to marry. The girls are obedient to their father; they respect his decisions while wishing he would be more responsible to his position in



the family. Francesca is forced to assume responsibility for the household when her mother dies in childbirth. For Francesca, the added responsibility makes her more determined than ever not to marry, since she realizes that marriage would conflict with her primary goal—that of becoming a master painter. Aletta, being younger, knows that Francesca will have the first opportunity to become an apprentice and sees no reason to trust that her father will make sure that she is apprenticed. She takes matters into her own hands and, in an effort to raise the money she will need for the apprenticeship fees, manages to go against the principles of art taught by her father.

This he sees as disrespect from his daughter, not recognizing that he might be at fault in any way. His ego and stubbornness will not allow him to forgive Aletta or let her remain in Amsterdam.

Each of the girls follows her heart in the end, marrying the man she falls in love with. The threads of each romance weave through the events of the novel. Francesca's love for Pieter grows, and she makes choices based on that love. The promises made by her father when he loses at cards to Ludolf show Hendrick's cowardly nature. With Aletta, Hendrick is unable to see that he could be in the least responsible for her trying to find a way to earn the money needed for an apprenticeship. All he sees is that she is producing and selling work he considers inferior and doing it without his permission. Although he has given his daughters freedom during the time they were growing up, he considers it an affront when they do anything that does not reflect absolute obedience to him. Hendrick believes Sybylla's engagement to Adriaen, who is both rich and handsome, is his answer to the trouble he is in with gambling debts to Ludolf.

Hendrick and Anna Visser are the parents of Francesca, Sybylla, and Aletta. They have brought the girls up in an atmosphere of love, nurturing, and freedom typical of the times. Hendrick is egotistical and eccentric; he teaches his daughters when he feels like it rather than on a regular schedule. He paints the same way—when the mood strikes him—and everyone is supposed to support him and make excuses for him to cover his mistakes. His wife Anna, the girls' mother, is devoted to her husband and family but realizes she must make sure her daughters do not lose out because of Hendrick's careless ways. She manages to get the proper paperwork done so that the training the girls have received from their father will count as part of their years of apprenticeship. Without those documents, the girls would have to spend a minimum of six years as the apprentice of another artist before being allowed to submit work to be judged by a guild. Membership in a guild is necessary in order to be recognized as a master painter and command the respect needed to have a career as an artist.

Hendrick recognizes Francesca and Alette's talents but lacks the discipline to closely supervise their training. He has been giving them training in basic skills, such as mixing paints and developing a sense of the quality of a work, but has not been interested in making sure their careers are started well.

He is basically self-centered to the degree that his family suffers at times because he does not consider their needs. Anna is the buffer, finding ways to insure the family has enough food, and when Anna dies, Francesca finds herself the buffer and the actual



head of the household with the responsibility but not the authority to make decisions. When Francesca leaves for her apprenticeship, one of her main concerns is how the family will manage without her.

The sharing of responsibilities for the home among her sisters and the servants, Griet and Maria, allows Francesca to leave with a clear conscience.

Ludolf van Deventer is the villain. Unscrupulous, a spy for the French, a murderer, and a former pirate, Ludolf does not care about the freedom of anyone but himself.

He uses every tool at his disposal to be sure that Hendrick will become indebted to him and then have to agree to his marriage to Francesca. Hendrick allows his vanity to blind him to Ludolf's true nature, and Francesca suffers for his mistakes.

Maria and Griet are servants who are treated as members of the family, supporting the girls in their art. They are given the respect of the family members, live in the house, take charge of household expenses, and worry about the family. Maria is adept in the art of bobbin lace, making the collars and cuffs worn by the female members of the family. The Dutch are still noted for their skill in that craft. Maria knows she will be allowed to stay in the Visser household for as long as she wants, being cared for in her old age. When Griet marries, it is a Visser family occasion. Francesca comes home for a visit, making a difficult journey by horse-drawn stage from Delft to Amsterdam.

Willem de Hartog is Hendrick's art dealer.

Without Willem, Hendrick would not be able to sell his work because of his bad temper and refusal to paint on a schedule. Willem has the interests of the girls at heart: it is at his prompting that Anna makes sure the proper apprenticeship paperwork is there for Francesca and Aletta.

Over and over Willem keeps the family from bankruptcy by arranging the sale of Hendrick's work.

Pieter van Doorne, a tulip grower whose father was one of the fortunate people to make money during the period of tulipomania, is the hero of the novel and the future husband of Francesca. Truly in love with her, Pieter is willing to allow her to fulfill her dream of becoming an artist, helping financially, when necessary, to help her reach her goal. Patriotic, willing to help stop an impending invasion by the French, Pieter fulfills his role as hero while aiding Francesca's attainment of her goals.

Two of the most famous painters of the Dutch school, Rembrandt and Hals, figure in the story, helping to explain the place of the artist in the society of the day. Although already deceased, Hals is cast as the master painter who trained Hendrick. Rembrandt is a friend of the family who is mourned when he dies and whose work influences Francesca in her quest to use light in her paintings.



## Social Concerns

Set in the Golden Age of the Dutch nation, a period lasting for most of the seventeenth century, *The Golden Tulip* provides insights into the society and customs of a freedom-loving people. The protagonist, Francesca Visser, and her sisters, daughters of a fictional Amsterdam artist, have been reared in an atmosphere of art and freedom. Having shown a talent for painting, two of the sisters are receiving artistic instruction from their father. (It was not considered unusual for a woman in the Netherlands to become a master artist if she completed her apprenticeship and was approved for membership in a guild.)

The Netherlands in the seventeenth century was more liberal than the rest of Europe; the Dutch had won the right to govern themselves by defeating the Spanish in the Eighty Years War. In 1669, the Dutch were again threatened by invasion, this time by Louis XIV of France, who believed in the divine right of kings and was a Roman Catholic. Louis believed, as Philip II of Spain had, that he ruled by the grace of God and that Protestants were heretics who needed to be returned to the one true church, the Roman Catholic Church.

The characters in *The Golden Tulip* reflect the concerns of the Dutch at that time about the danger of losing their personal freedom. Laker uses an incident involving a young Frenchman who boasts about the size of Louis's army and consequently has to flee to the Dutch guardsmen for protection from enraged Dutchmen to show the volatile mood of the people and their hatred of the French. Staunch Protestants, Hendrick Visser and his family fear religious persecution if the French take over their country. William III of Orange is a rallying point in the novel: Pieter (Francesca's love interest) meets him and agrees to serve him. William also orders Francesca released from prison when she is being held in Delft for disobeying her father.

The events that shaped the social climate of the novel began in the sixteenth century with a revolt in the Netherlands against Spanish rule that led to the Eighty Years War. While used to foreign rule because the Lowlands had been under the domination of various countries since the Middle Ages, the Dutch were unprepared for the harshness of the rule of Philip II of Spain. In August 1559, Philip visited the Netherlands and demanded a three-million-guilder payment to Spain, the suppression of all Protestant sects, and acceptance of the rule of his half sister, the Duchess of Parma. The Dutch Protestants rebelled, attacking Catholic churches and destroying everything connected to the priesthood, including the medieval art treasures in the churches.

Philip retaliated by sending the Duke of Alva and ten thousand troops to put down the rebellion. Alva besieged and destroyed many of the towns in the Lowlands and established the Court of Troubles, which sentenced many Dutch nobles to death. The first of these to die were the Counts of Egmont and Hoorne, who were beheaded on June 5, 1568. *The World of Vermeer* reports that as time passed "groups of 30, 40, and 50 people at a time were being condemned to die; their property was confiscated by the Crown."



Prince William I of Orange became a central figure in the rebellion as the young nobility rallied around him and rebellion gradually spread throughout the population. William was appointed to the post of Stadbounder by the States-General, the parliamentary body made up of representatives from each of the provinces. The seven northern provinces of the region (Holland, Zeeland, Utrecht, Guelderland, Overijssel, Friesland, and Groningen) formed the United Provinces—the Netherlands of today—under the leadership of William. William was pushed to rebellion by Alva's harshness, becoming the father of his country by finding the money and the troops to fight the Spanish. Upon William's assassination in 1584, his son, Maurice, became commander in chief and continued the fight. Time and again the Dutch opened their dikes, letting in the sea and destroying farms and homes to defeat the Spanish.

In 1600, Maurice led the Dutch to a decisive victory at the Battle of Nieuwport, resulting in a truce, which was signed in 1609. Forty years later, the Eighty Years War was ended in 1648 with the signing of the Treaty of Westphalia, in which the Netherlands became an independent nation and a world leader. Marijke Hesselin, writing in the *Encyclopedia Americana*, says, ". . . the Treaty of Westphalia . . . once and for all established that a people have the right to decide their own future and their own government, a right that the rulers of Europe were forced to accept." The divine right to rule, which the kings and queens of Europe had espoused for centuries, was coming to an end.

The boundaries of the Netherlands have remained much the same since the end of the Eighty Years War although the southern provinces eventually became Belgium.

The effect on the artists of the day was dramatic. Until that time (and continuing in most of the rest of Europe), the single greatest art patron was the Catholic Church, supporting artists by commissioning religious paintings as altar pieces and various other works to decorate churches. Wealthy noblemen also supported artists, acting as patrons and receiving works of art to decorate their homes in return. In the seventeenth-century, Protestant, capitalist Netherlands, the Dutch school of art moved in a different direction, driven by the need of Dutch artists to sell their work to the general population whose new leaders were merchants. Because paintings were used to decorate homes and businesses, the many artists working at that time were able to find a market for their paintings. Pottery making flourished in Delft, but sculpture was not in demand, possibly because sculpture was associated with Roman Catholicism.

In the novel, Hendrick Visser makes his living from painting pictures used to decorate homes in Amsterdam. Ludolf van Deventer purchases a painting of Francesca in a gypsy costume from Hendrick's art dealer and decides he must have Francesca.

He begins his campaign to win her by asking Hendrick to paint his portrait. Portraits are a lucrative business at the time; the portrait gives Ludolf a logical excuse to become Hendrick's patron. When Hendrick refuses the commission but allows Francesca to take it in his place, he thinks he is furthering her career. Unwittingly, Hendrick puts Francesca at risk by allowing her close contact with Ludolf. The consequences show that women are not as free to make decisions about their lives as Francesca has been brought up to believe.



Pieter attends a party at the Visser home on December 6, the day of the Feast of St.

Nicholas, and presents the Visser family with a hyacinth in a Delft pot, saying it should bloom by Christmas. The idea of forcing a bulb to bloom in the winter is in its experimental stages, and so the present is unique. Delftware is made from porcelain, highly decorated, often in the Japanese or Chinese style, a fitting holder for such an unusual plant. The city of Delft is today still a center for making this kind of pottery.

Motivation for Dutch expansion was trade rather than colonization, but the mariners established points on foreign soil from which they were able to protect their shipping from native populations and rival European interests. In the process, the Dutch became the freight carriers for all of Europe, with their ports of call extending from Europe to Japan to China and the spice islands of the East Indies.

Pieter van Doorne exemplifies the Dutch merchant class. The Netherlands is famous for its tulip bulbs, sold throughout the world then as now. Pieter has built on the business left to him by his father, a business with its roots in tulipomania. He improves the family tulip farm and enlarges the business.

Pieter is a member of the Civil Guard, an organization much like the U.S. National Guard today. The Netherlands depends on the Civil Guard to help keep order; members serve part-time to allow them to conduct business or work at a job. The incident involving the young Frenchman who brags about Louis XIV's armies shows the temper of the citizens and allows the budding romance between Francesca and Pieter room to grow. Pieter's Civil Guard position also allows him to fight against the French invasion.

The rise of Protestantism is credited with aiding the rise of capitalism and the rise of the Netherlands to leadership in commerce.

The World of Vermeer concludes that "their new religion, by glorifying hard work, thrift and sobriety, and by emphasizing the value of labor and the common man, provided the right psychological climate for the capitalistic economy." Other countries in Europe had more land but were still under the feudal system and were economically backward. In the Netherlands, The World of Vermeer continues, the town councils were made up of the "most wise and rich" (the most successful merchants) who, in turn, "directed the provincial State-General that met in The Hague to haggle over national policy. . . . Thus during the entire 17th Century, the Netherlands was governed by the mercantile upper middle class, a business oligarchy of some 10,000 families."

The Golden Tulip is set at the end of the Dutch Renaissance, just before Louis XIV tried to overrun the Netherlands. The Visser family is Protestant, believes in freedom for their daughters, and has the trappings of a middle-class family. Hendrick shows the Dutch spirit of independence when he refuses to paint a portrait because he does not want to be bound by a schedule for sittings.

His daughters are typical of young women of the period, choosing the course of their lives rather than having it dictated to them by their parents, at least until their parents make mistakes. The merchant class, the ruling class at that time, is well represented by





Pieter and Ludolf in the story. Pieter's father was one of the lucky ones who profited from tulipomania, twenty-five years before, leaving Pieter with a tulip farm that is profitable enough for him to afford a house in Amsterdam. Pieter sells his bulbs and flowers from several stalls, typical of the times. When he is needed in Delft, this method of selling merchandise makes it easy for him to set up his business. A stall in Delft is both profitable and gives Pieter the perfect place for gathering information for the Prince of Orange. Ludolf's wealth is derived from illegal sources, and he uses the advantages money brings to try to get whatever he wants.

Among the artists of the period were such masters as Rembrandt, Frans Hals, and Jan Vermeer. These artists and their contemporaries have left a body of work that opens the everyday world of the period to the modern viewer. The symbols that fill these paintings told the seventeenth-century viewer the story of the people in the paintings. Rembrandt is cast as a friend of the Visser family, influencing Hendrick's art style and strengthening his fears of dying in poverty. Frans Hals is dead at the time the story takes place, but Hendrick apprenticed with him, learning much about use of light and color. Hendrick takes his daughters on a pilgrimage to Hals's grave in Haarlem, to honor his mentor and teacher.

Laker uses this to allow Francesca to visit Pieter's tulip farm, further connecting the story with its historical setting. Jan Vermeer is known today for his use of light and the unusual way he portrayed his sitters. It is not known who the woman shown in many of his paintings is; Laker draws a logical conclusion that the woman Vermeer painted repeatedly was his wife.

## Techniques

Laker says in the author's note at the beginning of *The Golden Tulip* that "there is no record of Jan Vermeer ever having had an apprentice, but by letting my heroine enter his studio I have paid my personal tribute to the beauty and tranquility of his work." By using descriptions of paintings by Vermeer and Rembrandt, Laker has drawn attention to the daily lives of the Dutch people of the period. She continues to recreate the world of the time by incorporating words such as "mijnheer," "Juffrouw," and others into the dialogue. The characters' names fit the time and place.

Careful use of historical facts and characterization of the historical personages takes the reader into the period. Descriptions of the cities, the modes of travel, and daily life build a picture of the world of the upper middle class in the Netherlands in the late 1660s. By adding details such as the postal delivery and the description of the bracelets the girls receive from their aunt in Italy, Laker creates a believable world, containing the beginnings of many customs and freedoms we know today.

When Aletta adopts wearing a cap to hide what is left of her hair, Laker writes, "It was an old custom that had never lost its grip, although the French fashion of drawing the hair smoothly into a coil at the back of the head, leaving the neck free with a few curls dangling over each ear, had banished cap wearing for all those with an eye for mode." A description of the location of the newest and most expensive residence in Amsterdam, belonging to Ludolf van Deventer, as "on Heerengracht, the Gentlemen's Canal, which was also known as the Golden Bend as a mark of the wealth of those who lived there" introduces an upper middle class made up of wealthy merchants.

Laker allows questions about Ludolf's lineage to surface immediately, underscoring the importance of the relationships among families. When Sybylla becomes engaged to marry the son of a wealthy banking family, the blurring of class lines is evident.

Francesca's being allowed to travel to Delft without a family member to chaperone her shows the relaxed attitude toward women that was found in Dutch society. These details help develop a picture of life in the seventeenth-century Netherlands.

# Themes

The Netherlands was the first country in Europe to move from the feudal system that had oppressed the working class for centuries into a more open, democratic, and capitalist society. While women were expected to obey the male members of the household, they were often given a choice rather than an order. Women could also become apprentices if they showed talent in a particular field and were given permission by the male head of the household. In the rest of Europe, women were considered as property, were not educated unless they were members of the nobility, and were under the strict rule of the male members of the family. The difficulties brought to the Visser family by an irresponsible father are overcome by the strength of character of the female members of the family.

In keeping with the spirit of the times, Laker has given a great deal of freedom to her heroine. Francesca is allowed the freedom to have her father turn away suitors, refusing marriage since it would interfere with her ambition to become a master artist and member of a guild. Her sister Aletta also has ambitions to become an artist.

Sybylla, the middle sister, is looking for a husband. Each character is given choices, unusual for the time period anywhere but the Netherlands. When Francesca finds herself with much less freedom in Delft than she was used to in Amsterdam, her obedience to her father takes over. Francesca focuses on her goal of becoming an artist rather than fighting against the constraints placed on her.

The fear of the French that is apparent in the novel is explained by memories of the rule of Philip of Spain. The Dutch were used to freedom of religion by 1669, at least for Protestants. The World of Rembrandt reports that people who remained members of the Roman Catholic Church worshiped at home because their churches were taken over by the Protestants in many instances.

The Netherlands was a refuge for Protestants who were persecuted in many other parts of Europe. Had Louis XIV been allowed to gain control of the Dutch people, freedom of religion would have been the first freedom to go. The States-General would have been disbanded. The wealthiest members of the merchant class supported Louis because they knew that they would lose the most financially if the country went to war; however they had not considered how their positions would change if they were to be dominated by France.

Pieter is willing to risk his life and his livelihood to help retain the freedom his country enjoys. He understands that Louis will not allow the merchant class to continue to rule the country and that once the trade routes the Dutch have developed are under the control of the French, the Dutch merchants will no longer profit from them.

Pieter feels honored to be chosen to meet the prince and to serve by gathering information about the impending invasion.



The Golden Age of the Dutch people extended to all corners of the society. Where paintings were once owned only by the wealthy or the church, the merchant class, wealthy and not so wealthy, was now able to decorate the walls of their homes and businesses with original works of art. Without patrons, the artists sold to whoever had money to buy, through an art dealer, from the studio, or from stalls in the market places. Descriptions of the works of art in the Visser home and in the Vermeer home show the value placed on art used as decoration at the time. Our modern arts and crafts fairs have their roots in Europe when merchants sold from stalls in the town square.



## Key Questions

The Golden Tulip describes the life and times of a family of artists in the Netherlands in the seventeenth century. The differences in religion, the economy, and the way the government ruled the country led to differences in the way Dutch artists viewed their work as compared to artists in the rest of Europe. These differences led to the emergence of a strong, wealthy middle class in the Netherlands much earlier than in the rest of the continent.

1. Compare the Dutch middle-class merchants in the seventeenth century to American middle-class merchants today.
2. Discuss the pros and cons of the apprentice system. Do you think the apprentice system would have advantages over modern-day high schools and colleges?
3. Is there any sort of apprentice system in place in America today? If so, in what fields do you find evidence of it?
4. Do research to discover what was expected of an apprentice in at least one field during seventeenth-century Holland.
5. Over the centuries religious beliefs have caused conflict. Choose another time in history when there has been a prominent religious conflict, and compare it to the situation described in The Golden Tulip.
6. Compare the end of tulipomania with the crash of the U.S. stock market in 1929.
7. Has the Netherlands completed all its reclamation projects? Look for information that describes the physical changes the Dutch have made to their country to make it livable.
8. Compare the techniques used by Vermeer and Rembrandt.
9. Describe the processes used by seventeenth-century artists to prepare their materials. What kinds of paints, supports, and brushes did they use?
10. Make a list of symbols and their meanings in Dutch painting in the seventeenth century.
11. Recently, there has been much controversy regarding the authenticity of several paintings by major artists. Do some research to determine how paintings are determined to be authentic and write a report about your findings. Report on how certain styles, techniques, and themes are used to identify specific artists, such as Vermeer's use of light.

# Literary Precedents

Historical fiction covers time periods from ancient civilizations to modern ones. Writers such as Charles Dickens, Willa Cather, Isabel Allende, James Michener, and others have used historical events as a backdrop for fiction. Joyce Saricks, writing for Booklist, underlines the importance of the genre by saying that "Historical fiction makes a point of conveying a serious respect for historical accuracy and detail, and its intention, beyond providing reading pleasure, is to enhance the reader's knowledge of past events, lives and customs." Saricks says there are four basic elements in historical fiction: accurate historical data, authenticity when portraying characters, the importance of the characters as opposed to the importance of the events, and the pacing of the story, allowing it to unfold slowly while keeping the interest of the reader.

Charles Dickens's novels set in Victorian England have been likened to history books.

In *British Writers*, Barbara Hardy says, "it is hard to think of the wretched Victorian orphan or the workhouse without remembering *Oliver* and his porridge bowl, of the Victorian capitalist without remembering *Dombey* and his son, of sly or brutal crime without remembering the *Dorrits*, of the newly rich without remembering the *Veneerings*, or cant and prudishness without *Podsnap*. . . . His fictions are packed with social information and social passion."

What would Christmas be without Tiny Tim and the changes in Scrooge's personality? Hendrick and Scrooge both overcome personality problems and are ultimately able to put others ahead of their own desires.

Willa Cather's *O Pioneers!* is based on memories from her childhood in Nebraska.

Other novels' locations range from France in World War I, in *One of Ours* (1922), to Hamilton, Michigan, in *The Professor's House* (1925), to a nineteenth-century mission in New Mexico, in *Death of the Archbishop* (1927).

In *American Women Writers*, Lina Mainiero says that Cather "is one of the few American writers who can take her place among the great European writers who have gloriously pictured the natural world." Events in history are made real by her characters' understanding and explanations.

James Michener's panoramic historical novels span the centuries, beginning with *Hawaii*, first published in 1959. Considered a new type of historical novel, the book begins with the formation of the Hawaiian Islands and continues through their settlement by the Polynesians, who lived there for centuries before being discovered by the white man. Hoxworth Hale, a direct descendant of some of the founding families, native and white, narrates the story. *The Source* (1965) treats Israel in a similar way, beginning with early history and ending with events from the 1960s. Other novels in this genre include *Centennial* (1974), *Chesapeake* (1978), *Texas* (1985), *Alaska* (1988), *Caribbean* (1989), and *Mexico* (1991). His *Tales of the South Pacific* (1947) won the

Pulitzer Prize for fiction and was the basis for Rogers and Hammerstein's *South Pacific* (1949).

The *Golden Tulip* contains all four of Saricks's basic elements for good historical fiction. The story points to several facts about the Netherlands that are at odds with the social conditions in the rest of Europe in that period. The Netherlands and England were primarily Protestant; the rest of Europe was Roman Catholic. Women in the Netherlands had more opportunities for education and to make choices about their lives than did the women in most European countries, including England. The Dutch school of art presented different subject matter from the work of artists in the rest of Europe. Europe was still under the feudal system that did not provide the middle and lower classes any hope of attaining wealth.

The economic system in the Netherlands encouraged individual effort through its capitalistic philosophy. By touching on events past and present to the time of the story, such as the Eighty Years War and tulipomania, *The Golden Tulip* expands general knowledge about seventeenth century Holland.

Fans of the genre want to learn about times and places different from their own, writes Saricks, embracing "a wide range of novels, from more serious and literary to sagas, romances, adventure tales and mysteries. . . . Fiction encapsulates much of a country's culture, and historical fiction can be seen as part of a long tradition of interpreting and preserving past events. . . . The best historical fiction combines both of these elements to help readers understand the past, a key factor in comprehending the present and envisioning the future." Supply-side economics and women's rights have their roots in seventeenth-century Holland.



## Related Titles

Rosalind Laker's historical novels are set in various places in Europe during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. *Orchids and Diamonds* (1995) is set in Paris during the lifetime of the sculptor Rodin. *The Sugar Pavilion* (1994) depicts life in Brighton, England, in the eighteenth century, when that city was the playground of English royalty.

*The Venetian Mask* (1992) describes eighteenth-century Venice through the eyes of two young women. *Circle of Pearls* (1990) is set in England during Cromwell's rule and the Restoration. *To Dance with Kings* (1989) illustrates life at the court of Louis XIV of France at Versailles. Also by Laker are *The Smuggler's Bride*, *Ride the Blue Riband*, *Warwyck's Woman*, *Claudine's Daughter*, *Warwyck's Choice*, *Banners of Silk*, *Gilded Spendour*, *Jewelled Path*, *What the Heart Keeps*, *This Shining Land*, *Tree of Gold* and *The Silver Touch*, all historical novels.

Isabelle Allende's *Daughter of Fortune* (1999) sweeps from England to Chile to China and then to the California gold rush of 1849, connecting the characters through accident and design, adventure and romance. The twists of the story are set against the backdrop of the years preceding the gold rush, and the political and economic consequences that followed. The adventure is offset by the hardships endured by the characters. As with *Francesca*, Eliza's journeys are typical of her day, slow, uncomfortable, and dangerous. The characters in *Daughter of Fortune* each have a detailed story, as do the sisters in *The Golden Tulip*, beginning with family members and their relationships. The events of each historical period shape the relationships among the characters in both of the books.





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