heavily implied that without such an infrastructure, neither Dutch society nor the economy based upon it, could subsist. Goldgar makes a leap of faith herself to reach so deeply into the minds of these Dutch observers, but she has painted such a rich portrait of a vibrant and cohesive society that she can perhaps be granted license for her more intuitive and empathetic conclusions.

The inside pages of Tulipmania are adorned with many colorful plates and interesting drawings of, among other things, a group of men farting into the wind. In her prose, Goldgar does not do the usual historiographical name checking and disguises her knowledge of a highly cross-disciplinary literature behind a rolling narrative style. When appropriate, she provides clear explanations for events and people not well known outside of the Netherlands. Each chapter (as stated previously) begins with an evocative vignette that illustrates the deeper issues in the ensuing chapters. Despite all this, Tulipmania is not a work primarily intended for a popular audience or an undergraduate classroom, nor should it be. This is a book for historians. Critics often excoriate the inaccessibility of historical prose, but there is nothing that can match the satisfaction a scholar finds in reading a text that speaks to a deep understanding of historical phenomenon, advances that understanding, and inspires new directions in historical research. These goals are incompatible with those of popular literature. In Goldgar’s hands, the moral of the story of Tulipmania is not about admonitions regarding economic behavior, but rather the satisfaction of rich and imaginative scholarship.


In another handsome volume from Ashgate Press, Catherine Armstrong differentiates travel narratives of the 15th and 16th centuries from those of the seventeenth century. As she says “Writing North America explores the intellectual framework of Englishmen who were beginning to break free from the confines of classical knowledge” (3), the primary vehicle of Elizabethan travel narratives. In addition, Armstrong states, her book challenges “over-simplified arguments about the intellectual history of the nascent British Empire by exploring the English reactions to the challenging conditions experienced in
the New World” (3-4).

In order to support her claims, Armstrong has assembled and assessed an impressive number of texts. Her bibliography, for example, includes 30 manuscript sources, 130 printed sources before 1700, 59 printed sources published after 1700, and 307 secondary works. The sheer quantity of material indicates not only the inclusiveness and comprehensiveness of her research and scholarship, but it also reveals her thorough coverage of the subjects and periods she addresses.

The strength of this book lies in Armstrong’s attention to how the print trades of both England and America contributed to perceptions of and attitudes about the New World. Indeed, Armstrong examines numerous travel journals, broadsides, pamphlets, histories, letters, diaries, and even poetry to explore the tensions between an “imagined landscape” and the “realities of America” (17). These “tools,” as Armstrong says, can be used “to re-examine the traditional controversy: how similar or different were the various North American colonies?” (17).

Armstrong frames her work with chapters that focus directly on the print trade. In chapter one “‘Printing and Adventuring’: The Convergence of Literature and Discovery,” she investigates four interrelated topics: (1) “the significance of the chosen material form of the texts”; (2) “the tropes and genres used to convey certain messages and opinions about the New World”; (3) “the role of the intellectual networks of the authors”; and (4) “the intended readership of these words” (20). In chapter eight “Transmission and Reception of American News in England,” Armstrong focuses on the relationship among audience, writer, and text, and she again explores four overlapping issues: (1) “the medium in which the text was reproduced”; (2) “the cost and means of production”; (3) the choice authors made “to distribute their texts in England and in the colonies,” even after the establishment of the first printing press in America in 1638; and (4) “the networks of readers who pursued information on North America, and [who] formed communication connections that were utilized to spread the word” (173).

In the middle chapters, Armstrong focuses on how authors combined “two themes in their writing on America: that of ‘place’, the landscape, climate, flora and fauna, and of ‘potential’, expansion of commerce and empire . . .” (17). Of the middle chapters—(2) The Geography and Climate of North America, (3) Representations of the American Landscape, (4) Colo-
nists and the Flora of America, (5) The Fauna of North America, (6) Representations of English Society in Virginia: Intentions and Realities, and (7) Representations of Society in New England: Intentions and Realities—chapter two—“The Geography and Climate of North America”—serves as a good exemplum of Armstrong’s focus and approach. She centers on three interrelated subjects: cartography, navigation, and meteorology. As Armstrong points out, even the seemingly objective practice of map-making functioned as a tool in the discursive representation of the New World: “The commission of maps and representations of the world in map form became part of the European power discourse in which the hegemony she aspired to over the continents of Asia, Africa, and newly discovered America was represented symbolically . . . . To know and define an area and so be able to map it accurately was to assert control over it” (44).

In her final chapter, simply entitled “Conclusion,” Armstrong draws a number of significant inferences from the wealth of information that she has gathered and digested. Her final self-reflexive comment is perhaps most worth noting. Her book, as she says, “. . . is distinctive in placing equal importance on the authors’ intentions for the colonies and their reactions to the realities of the life they experienced. Rather than claiming that understanding was influenced either from Europe or America I have highlighted the importance of the diverse cultural connections. These connections were forged in part by the circulation of print and manuscript news relating to the ‘place’ and the ‘potential’ of the New World” (201).

Armstrong’s style, while it occasionally borders on the mechanical, is direct and unpretentious, and thus her book is accessible and worthwhile. Because it is both informed and informing, this book is exceedingly useful for the novice student of early modern literature—both English and American—and it is an excellent resource for the seasoned scholar.