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Susanna Teellinck, the Earliest Known Dutch Reformed Woman Editor and Biographer

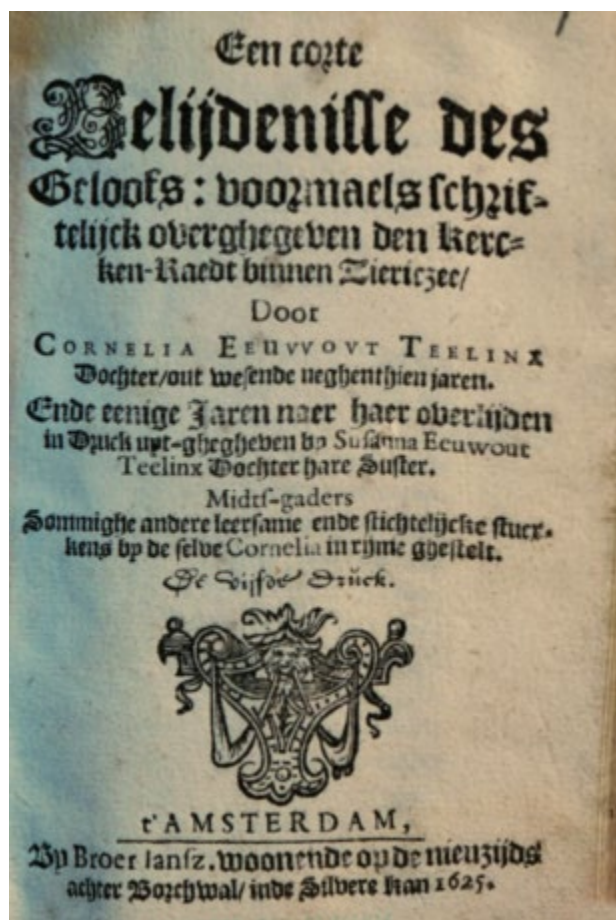
[July 10, 2019](#)

In this blog post, Amanda Pipkin draws attention to a little known Dutch editor and biographer, making the important argument that because “authorship” can take many forms for women in the early modern period, we should appreciate the textual contributions of women that take smaller forms such as prefaces and dedicatory poems.



Nicolaes Maes, Dutch, 1634–1693; *The Account Keeper*, 1656; oil on canvas; 26 × 21 1/8 inches; Saint Louis Art Museum. Museum, Purchase 72:1950

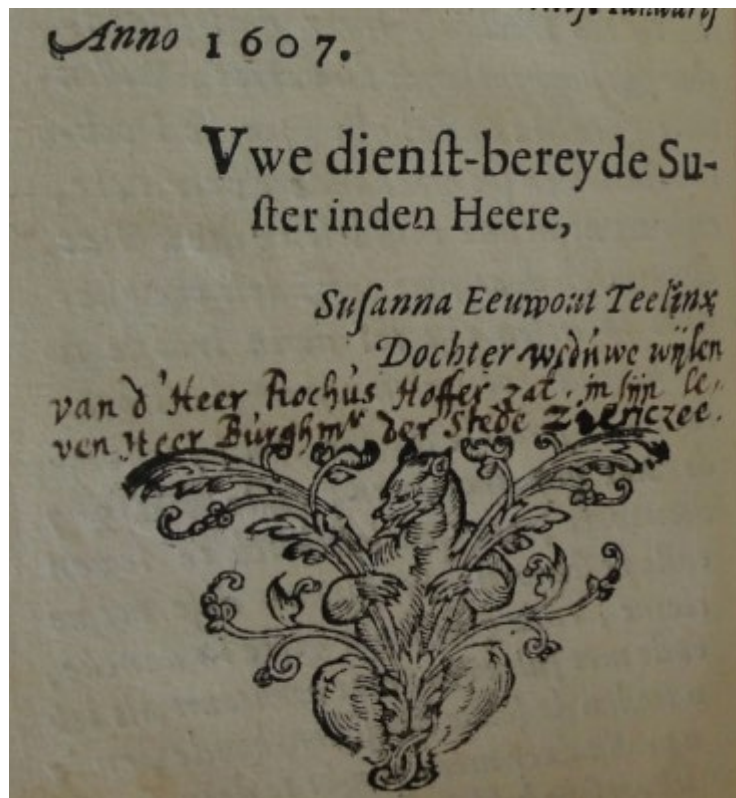
What counts as authorship? When are translations and edited works actually quite original? What can we learn by examining other ways women have contributed to textual production? Over the last decade many scholars have revealed the value of women's literary contributions beyond traditional forms of authorship. Two inspiring examples are Martine van Elk's clever identification of original elements in Anna Roemers Visscher and Esther Inglis' adaptations of Georgette de Montenay's emblem books and Leah Chang's groundbreaking study of Jeanne de Marnef's editorial strategy (chapters 8 and 4 respectively in Julie Campbell and Anne Larsen, *Early Modern Women and Transnational Communities of Letters*, 2009). These studies show that we can learn a great deal about women's literary involvement when we look beyond single-authored, original texts to consider other forms of writing, translating, and editing.



Title page of Cornelia Eeuwout Teellinx, *Een Corte Belijdenisse Des Geloofs...* in Druck uyt-ghegheven by Susanna Eeuwout Teellinx Dochter hare Suster (A Short Confession of Faith... published by Susanna Eeuwout Teellinx's Daughter, her Sister). Amsterdam, 1625. [Google books](#) Leiden University Special Collections, SEMREM 5673: 1.

Likewise, this blog is an act of recovery of untraditional authorship and editorial work. Susanna Teellinx (1551-1625) is not usually listed among Dutch women authors. And yet,

she wrote a seven-page introductory dedication in 1607 providing a brief biography of her sister Cornelia's life (1554-1576) and an explanation of why Cornelia's works merited publication (The surviving edition of this book from 1625 is available on [Google Books](#)). Following Susanna's introduction, the book contains a short poem by Susanna's son, the Zierikzee statesman and esteemed humanist author [Adrian Hoffer](#) (1580-1644) recommending the book, Cornelia's twelve-page confession of faith, and nine of Cornelia's poems.[1] Susanna's work has been overlooked at least since Pieter de la Rue [mentioned](#) it in his 1734 book on authors from Zeeland. De la Rue fails to mention Susanna in Cornelia's entry, and in fact he highlights Adrian's poem by including eight lines of it instead citing Cornelia's work.[2] Modern databases such as the [Short Title Catalogue Netherlands](#) and the fabulous [Digitaal Vrouwenlexicon van Nederland](#) note Susanna's contribution as the editor of Cornelia Teellinck's Short Confession of Faith, but do not provide Susanna with her own entry with a link to the bibliographic information. While this is a great improvement, this shows that modern scholars do not consider Susanna an author in spite of the evidence to the contrary.



"In the year 1607. Your willing serving sister in the Lord, Susanna Eeuwout Teellinx's Daughter" [handwritten addition: widow of the Lord Rochus Hoffer, Lord Burgermaster of Ziericzee], Introduction, *Een Corte Belijdenisse Des Geloofs...* Leiden University Special Collections, SEMREM 5673: 1. Photo A. Pipkin.

At first glance this seems a small oversight; However, overlooking Susanna's efforts as author makes it easier to obscure the magnitude of her literary contribution as editor of her sister's works and – what is more – the value of Dutch Reformed women's writing during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. It was after all Susanna who initiated the oldest known publication by a Dutch Reformed woman. Without her efforts as an author and editor, Cornelia's works would never have survived. Even as popular as this book must have been given that it was published in at least five editions, it survives only in one single fifth edition from 1625 in the Leiden University Special Collections. Moreover, it is impossible to know what editorial contributions Susanna made to her sister's confession of faith and poetry because as far as we know no manuscript copy of Cornelia's work has survived.

Ignoring Susanna's ability to write and circulate her sister's religious works between 1607 (when she wrote her introduction (see below)) and 1625 (the date of the only surviving edition) has allowed scholars to consider Cornelia's writings from the 1570s an aberration, an exception to the rule that Reformed women's literary contributions were not valued during the first generation of the Reformation in the Low Countries. Susanna's work bridges the temporal gap between Cornelia's writing in the 1570s and the most prolific and well-known Dutch Reformed woman [Anna Maria van Schurman](#) whose oldest surviving work "To the Muses of my lord (Jacob) Cats" (*Aen de Musen Van mijn heer Cats*, Koninklijk Bibliotheek 78 D 34) is from 1632. Considering Susanna's contributions during the first two decades of the seventeenth-century and the possibility that Susanna may have written other works over the course of her long life means that Cornelia's works were not necessarily an early exception to the rule, but a way for Reformed women to express their religious devotion over a longer period.

Taken together, the Teellinck sisters' experiences provide insight into how and which women could write and circulate religious texts during the first fifty years of the Reformation in the Low Countries. Based on the correlation between crisis and women's increased opportunities to make religious contributions outlined by Natalie Zemon Davis, Merry Wiesner, and others, it makes sense that Cornelia's contemporaries appreciated her religious writings. After all, she lived and wrote during the crisis years of the 1570s when many of the newly-converted Netherlandish Calvinists faced persecution and death. In 1568, the ruler of the Netherlands, [Phillip II of Spain](#) ordered the [Duke of Alba](#) to root out all Protestant heretics.



Frans Hogenberg, Spanish Violence at Antwerp (85, 158, November, 1576). In Frederik Muller, *De Nederlandsche geschiedenis in platen. Beredeneerde beschrijving van Nederlandsche historieplaten, zinneprenten en historische kaarten*. Amsterdam: F. Muller, 1863. New York Public Library, MDE, Print Room 30. Photo A. Pipkin.

Alba complied by instituting a court that found 10,000 Netherlanders guilty of heresy and treason and marched his troops on a number of cities of the Low Countries to terrify the Protestants into submission starting in 1572. These included Susanna and Cornelia's hometown of Zierikzee (1575-76) and Antwerp where Cornelia lived with her husband when the Army of Flanders mutinied, viciously attacking the city in 1576.



Crispijn de Passe the Elder, Portrait of Marquis Ambrogio Spinola, etching, after 1606, [British Museum 1927.1008.330](#).

Perhaps not surprisingly, in 1607, when Susanna authored her text and published her sister's works, the situation was similar to circumstances of the 1570s when Cornelia authored her works. Again, the Spanish were determined to regain control over the seven northern provinces of the Netherlands and were making rapid headway. Starting in 1601, the Spanish commander [Ambrogio Spinola](#) launched a series of very successful attacks on the new Dutch Republic, inspiring a wave of panic among the Dutch. Spinola captured a number of towns along the new Republic's eastern border, including Oldenzaal, Lingen, Rijnberk, and Grenlo as the following [Crispijn de Passe the Elder](#) etching details.

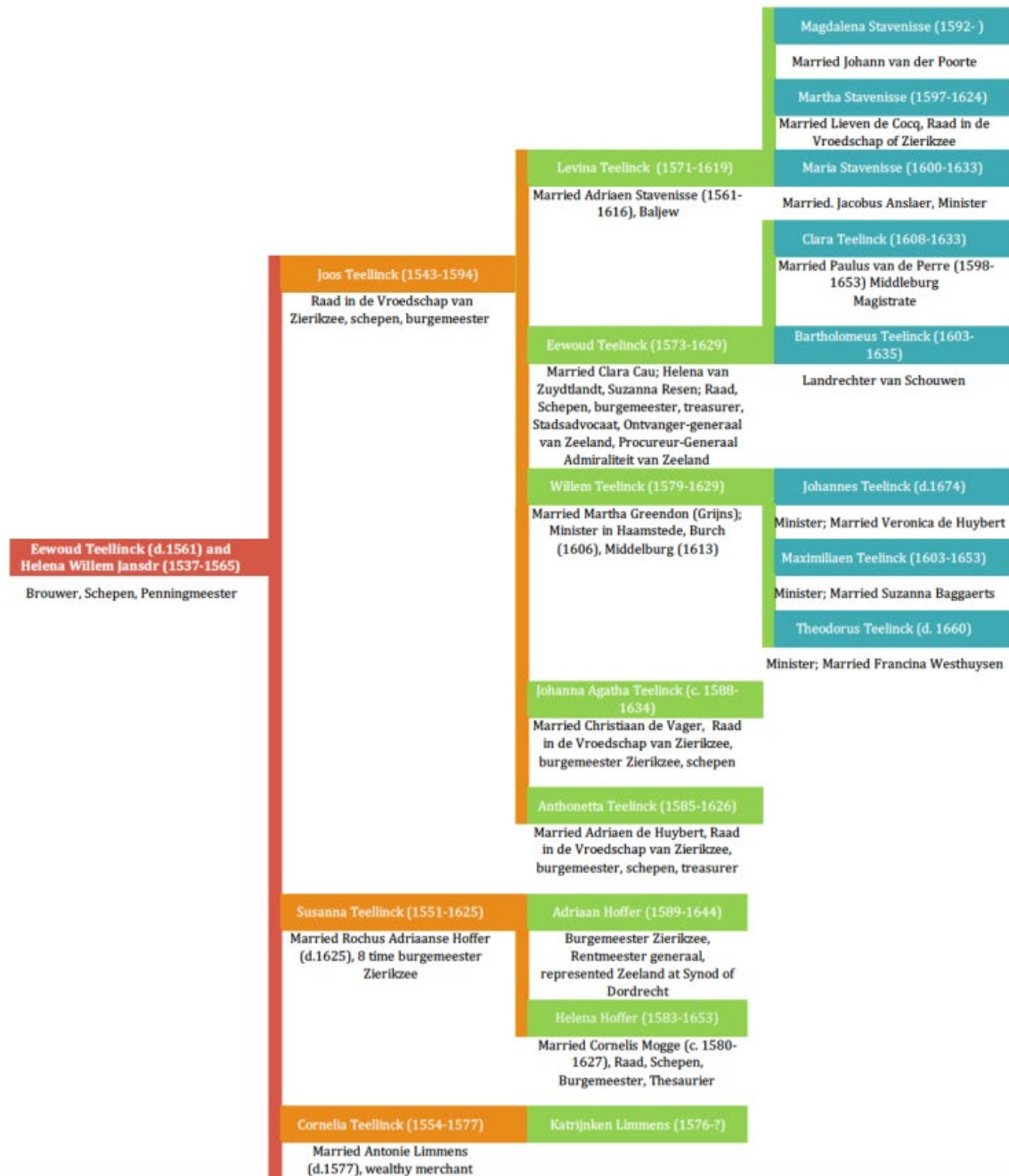
The Dutch had good reason to panic during Spinola's wave of conquest of many cities along the eastern border with Germany, as well as the southern port of Ostende after a particularly long and bloody siege. And, demonstrating that even the interior of the Dutch Republic was not safe, Spinola captured the the Zutphen quarter of Gelderland. Spain could not however maintain this momentum. By 1607 both sides were exhausted, the

Spanish treasury was bankrupt, and the adversaries began to negotiate what was to become the Twelve Years' Truce (1609-1621).

For many devout Calvinists, this was terrible news. They believed that the Dutch should fight Spain until the enemy was expelled from the Republic; And they feared that the Spanish planned to use diplomacy as a ruse to catch the Reformed Republic off guard and return the Northern Netherlands to Catholicism. So, they published a wave of anti-Spanish propaganda that reused Hogenberg's prints (like the one of Antwerp above) precisely during the years that Cornelia and Susanna's book was popular.^[3]

As this demonstrates, the Teellinck sisters' opportunities to write and publish religious works rested in part on Spanish resurgence and crisis. But they were also members of a powerful, middle-class Zeeland family. Their father [Eewoud Teellinck](#) (d.1561) a brewer in Zierikzee, served as alderman (*schepen*) and treasurer (*penningmeester*) in Schouwen and left his children an inheritance of 7,150 guilders, a house on the northside of the harbor, and a library with Latin, French, and German books.^[4] Their relatives included many esteemed local and regional bureaucrats, and even a few high-ranking national officials. As the chart below indicates, Teellincks often intermarried with other powerful families and dominated the bureaucratic posts of Zierikzee.

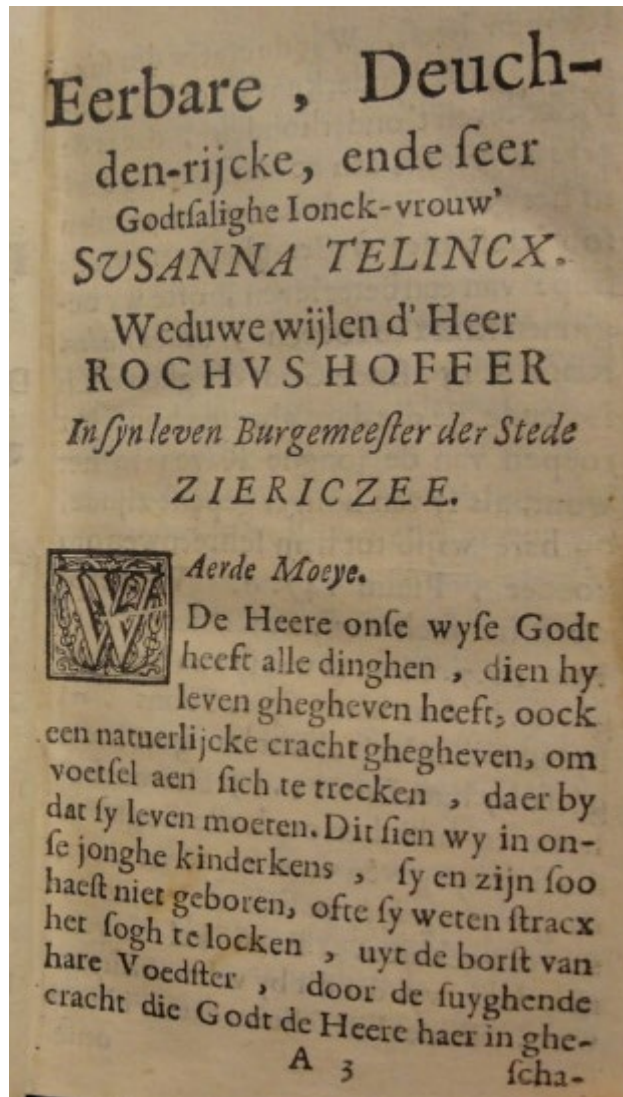
Descendants of Eewoud Teellinck



Genealogical information compiled by A. Pipkin

This genealogical chart also shows that Susanna was the aunt of the very influential and prolific minister [Willem Teellinck](#) (the son of her brother Joos), who dedicated his [Garden of Christian Prayer](#) (1635) to her. Willem praised her as leading an exemplary prayful life and

lauded her lifelong service to the needy.[5] Because Susanna's husband Rochus Hoffer had served as an elder, it is not unlikely that she would have helped him take care of needy people in their community of Zierikzee given that contemporaries expected elders of the church and their wives to assist the poor, the sick, foreigners, widows, and orphans.



Willem Teellinck's dedication to his aunt Susanna in Lust-hof der christelijcker gebeden, aen-wijsende hoe wy elcken dagh onses levens christelijcken sullen toebrenghe. Amsterdam: Johannes Scholperoor, 1648. University of Amsterdam Library, OTM: OK 62-1842. Photo A. Pipkin.

It is even possible that Susanna may have been recognized as a deaconess in her own right since the position of deaconess was possible but not encouraged in the Dutch Reformed church since the national synod of Middelburg in 1581.[6] However, most official deaconesses were widows of men who had served as deacons or elders, and although Susanna's husband had served as elder, they died in the same year.

To return to the questions posed above, Susanna Teellinck was certainly an author even if she only wrote seven pages. Although she was not the primary author of the book she edited, her introduction to her sister's writings should certainly count. On top of that Susanna should be famous for editing and preparing for publication the oldest known writing by a Reformed woman, a noteworthy contribution not only for the history of early modern women's writing, but also one which transforms our understanding of women's contributions to the Reformation in the Low Countries. The fact that she was able to do so rested on a number of factors including the fact that she wrote during a period of crisis, that she had a powerful, wealthy, supportive family, and that she conveyed a message of which influential ministers approved. Recognizing her achievements clarifies that contemporaries welcomed women's written contributions. Her example also offers hope that many more examples of untraditional authorship will come to light under closer examination of archives and library collections, and also when databases and catalogues credit women and men for more diverse kinds of contributions such as introductions, prefaces, and supplementary poems.

Amanda Pipkin is Associate Professor of History at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. She is author of [Rape in the Republic, 1609-1725: Formulating Dutch Identity](#), co-editor of [Women and Gender in the Early Modern Low Countries, 1500-1750](#) (available for free in Open Access), chair of the nominations committee of [SSEMWG](#), and available on Twitter: [@Pipstorian](#).

Further Reading

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Notes

[1] Susanna describes the whole book including her introduction in this way: "Dit sommierlijck verhael hares levens, ende stervens, ende dese hare corte belijdenisse des Gheloofs, met noch eenighe andere leersame ende stichtelijcke Stucxkens in dichte van haer over-ghebleven", Susanna's introduction in Cornelia Ewouts Teellinck, *Een Corte Belijdenisse Des Geloofs: Voormaels Schriftelijck Overghegeven Den Kercken-Raedt Binnen Ziericzee* (Amsterdam: Broer Jansz., fifth edition, 1625), 9.

[2] Pieter de la Rue, *Geletterd Zeeland, verdeeld in drie afdeelingen, bevattende in zig de schryvers, geleerden, en kunstenaars, uit dien staat geboortig, met bygevoegd levensverhaal der voornaamsten onder dezelve* (Middelburg: Michiel Schrijver, 1734), 194-195.

[3] For more on anti-Spanish propaganda see: Pipkin, “‘They were not humans, but devils in human bodies’: Depictions of Sexual Violence and Spanish Tyranny as a Means of Fostering Identity in the Dutch Republic,” *Journal of Early Modern History* 13 (2009): 229-264.

[4] “[Cornelia Eeuwoutsdr. Teelinck](#),” in *Digitaal Vrouwenlexicon van Nederland*.

[5] “Although you long to be with Christ, the sufferers whom you come to help in your city seek God to grant you a long life, because ... you demonstrate an extraordinary holy compassion for all people disturbed, saddened, and needy ... with comfort and understanding (that the Lord has richly bestowed on you)” Willem’s dedication to Susanna Teellinck preceeding his *Lust-Hof der Christelijcker Gebeden* [*Garden of Christian Prayer*] (Amsterdam: Johannes Schulperoort, 1648), A4 verso-A5 recto.

[6] For more see Liesbeth Geudeke, “Positie van vrouwen in de gereformeerde kerk, 1566-1650,” 70.

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