

Explore the Record of European Life and Culture

About Collection 13

Early European Books Collection 13 presents a selection themed around **literature, poetry and drama**. Items from London's Wellcome Library, Florence's *Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale*, Copenhagen's *Kongelige Bibliotek* and The Hague's *Koninklijke Bibliotheek* provide a rich assembly of content from across Europe. Supported by key classical and medieval texts, at the heart of Collection 13 is a body of works which document the remarkable flowering of vernacular literatures witnessed during the early modern period. Among the thousands of titles featured are acknowledged literary landmarks, but also less familiar items. Brought together, Collection 13 builds up a picture of the early modern literary scene that embraces ephemeral as well as timeless works, and that strongly accentuates its creative diversity. Collection 13 comes complete with USTC subject classifications to enable and enhance user experience.

From Homer to Persius

The early modern period was defined by its rediscovery of classical texts, and Collection 13 presents a choice of these ranging from literary giants like Homer and Ovid to more minor figures like Persius (34-62 CE) and Claudian (c.370-c.404 CE). Prose pieces include a 1624 Amsterdam edition of Apuleius (c.124-c.170 CE) which includes his *Metamorphoses* or *The Golden Ass*, while a 1700 edition of Petronius' notorious *Satyricon* is another bawdy inclusion. Classical literature's rediscovery inevitably involved its reconstruction, and items featured reflect both advances in textual scholarship and how the transition to print could risk distortion. Over time, Aesop, for example, had many tales wrongly ascribed to him. Similarly, Massimo Planude's famous 13th-century account of his life was a belated affair based on legend. A 1545 Venice edition of Planude's biography is featured in Collection 13, as is an illustrated 1486 incunabula Latin edition of Aesop. Meanwhile, competing early modern editions of the comedies of Terence (185-159 BCE) proved the difficulty of transposing his tricky Latin metre. Collection 13 offers a range of versions of Terence, including a 1644 Leiden edition with commentary by the 4th-century Aelius Donatus, a 1651 Amsterdam edition by Englishman Thomas Farnaby (1575-1647), as well as a 1539 Lyon edition with notes by both



Erasmus (1466-1536) and Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560). Other Erasmus items include a 1524 edition of Euripides in Greek and Latin, and a 1507 Aldine printing of the same Latin translation bound with his own classical imitation, *Ode de laudibus Britanniae*.

Books from the Middle Ages

Previous releases have commonly included works from the Middle Ages, and Collection 13 is no exception. A 1498 Lyon incunabula of Boethius's seminal 6th-century *The Consolation of Philosophy* is featured, while other highlights are from the 13th and 14th centuries. Among these are works by Albertus Magnus and by the logician Albert of Saxony. Also included are two 1665 Copenhagen editions of the *Edda Islandorum*, also known as the *Prose Edda*. Compiled by the Icelandic scholar Snorri Sturluson (1179-1241) in around 1220, the work remains central to our



knowledge of Old Norse literature and Viking myth. What became the supreme text of late medieval Italian literature – Dante’s *Divine Comedy* – is ably represented here in two impressive Venice editions. The first is from 1568 with commentary by Bernardino Daniello da Lucca (c.1500-1565), while the second is from 1578 and combines notes from previous editions by Christoforo Landino (1424-1498) and by Alessandro Vellutello (b.1473). This later edition also features illustrations from Vellutello’s first 1544 Francesco Marcolini printing, possibly by Giovanni Britto.

Another narrative to survive medieval times was the celebrated secret love affair of 12th-century French cleric Peter Abelard and the abbess Héloïse d’Argenteuil. First made famous by their original Latin correspondence, their romance was so appealing that a minor literary industry was later born, taking some liberties with their written exchanges. For example, Collection 13’s *Les amours d’Abailard & d’Heloïse* is a 1695 Amsterdam edition binding Jacques Allius’s (d.1688) original 1675 fictionalized text of that name with Abelard’s letters translated by Nicolas Rémond des Cours (d.1716). Abelard and Héloïse’s correspondence was misrepresented, but Héloïse’s outspoken letters also inspired future literary genres like the epistolary novel. Despite its fixation with classical literary conventions, the early modern period saw a multitude of new and exciting literary forms begin to emerge. The availability of translated classical texts flagged not just a new reading public, but a print industry newly aligned to vernacular literature. Collection 13 illustrates this cultural turn with works by some of Europe’s greatest early modern writers. Petrarch (1304-1374), for example, was an early catalyst of humanism and his Italian sonnets became a

template imitated across Europe. Collection 13 features a 1492 Venice printing of his *Epistolae familiares*, which includes his Mont Ventoux letter, a key text presaging the Renaissance.

Items from Spain focus on works from Spanish theatre’s Golden Age, although one curiosity is a 1699 Dutch translation of Cervantes’ (1547-1616) *Don Quixote*, recognized as the first modern novel. In the original Spanish, Collection 13 presents a 1635 Madrid edition of Tirso de Molina’s (1579-1648) comedies, as well as a 1626 Zaragoza printing of plays by Lope de Vega (1562-1635). French drama is exemplified by editions of Pierre Corneille (1606-1684), including a 1688 Paris printing of his *La Place royale*, and a 1695 Amsterdam libretto by Thomas Corneille (1625-1709) for the early opera, Charpentier’s *Medée*. Editions of Jean Galbert de Campistron’s (1656-1723) tragedy *Alcibiade* are present, as also is his libretto for *Alcide* by Lully and Marais. Libretti by Louise-Geneviève Gillot de Saintoge (1650-1718) include a 1694 text for Desmarests’ *Didon*, the first work performed at France’s Royal Academy of Music to be co-written by a female author. A 1675 edition of Rabelais (1494-1553) presents French prose at its satirical best, while a later French highlight is a 1699 edition of La Fontaine’s (1621-1695) *Contes et nouvelles en vers*. Dutch drama is also strongly featured. A 1644 Amsterdam edition collects the ribald plays of Gerbrand Bredero (1585-1618), while other highlights include editions of Samuel Coster’s (1579-1665) *Iphigenia*, numerous works by the fêted Joost van den Vondel (1587-1679), and a 1648 copy of Jan Six’s (1618-1700) *Medea*.

Emerging Literary Genres

Collection 13 also features a 1643 edition of Sir Francis Bacon’s influential *Nova Atlantis* (1627). A utopian fantasy mixing fiction, travel narrative and elements of political and philosophical enquiry, Bacon’s text is a reminder that many of the period’s new literary genres emerged not fully formed. By including a wide range of short works, pamphlets and news books, Collection 13 also shows how great literature shared a busy marketplace with a plethora of surprisingly varied and often sensational texts. Short works offered all manner of writings from playbills and topical verse to reports of voyages and battles to ballads and prognostications. Among the items included are accounts of Mount Etna’s 1669 eruption and a 1637 pamphlet, *Toonel van flora*, which playfully disputes the pros and cons of the burgeoning Dutch tulip trade. Of more specific interest is a wealth of material relating to the English Civil War, featuring proclamations and other documents authored by many of its leading protagonists.

