Extending the new thematic approach of Early European Books into an immeasurably rich new area, Collection 13 provides an exciting research resource and intimate access to many of the most important and intriguing texts of the early modern period. Collection 13 brings together a body of works focused around literature, poetry and drama.

Sourced from four prestigious library partners – the Wellcome Library in London, the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale in Florence, the Kongelige Bibliotek in Copenhagen and the Koninklijke Bibliotheek in The Hague – and demonstrate a rich assembly of content from numerous countries and from different epochs and eras.

Key literary works from classical times and by print editions of selected medieval texts, at the heart of Collection 13 is a body of works which document the remarkable flowering of national and vernacular literatures that so characterizes the early modern period across Europe. Among the thousands of works included are many of the period’s literary landmarks, but also less familiar items indicative of the wider tenor of the times. Bringing these together, Collection 13 builds up a picture of the early modern scene that embraces ephemeral pieces as well as works that have stood the test of time, and that emphasizes the heterogeneity and sheer creativity of its literary culture.

Collection 13 comes complete with USTC subject classifications to enable and enhance the user experience.

One of the defining aspects of Renaissance and early modern Europe was of course its rediscovery of texts from the classical world. Collection 13 includes a selection of literary works by Greek and Roman authors ranging from giants like Homer, Hesiod, Virgil and Ovid to lesser-known figures like the Latin poets Persius (34-62 CE) and Claudian (c.370-c.404 CE). The selection also includes prose pieces such as a 1624 Amsterdam edition by noted Dutch scholar Petrus Scrivereus (Peter Schrijver) of the works of Apuleius (c.124-c.170 CE), whose Metamorphoses or The Golden Ass is the only so-called “Roman novel” to have survived fully intact. Petronius’ Satyricon, a satirical narrative mixing prose and verse, is another bawdy inclusion, this time in an Amsterdam edition dating from 1700.

Part of the rediscovery of classical literature also inevitably involved its reconstruction, and editions found in Collection 13 pay testimony both to contemporary advances in textual scholarship and to the way transition to print newly exposed ancient texts to the risks of contamination and distortion. The Greek storyteller Aesop, for example, may have needed no rediscovery (versions of his fables had continued to be circulated since antiquity), but over time more and more tales came to be unreliably ascribed to him, while the best-known account of his life – written in the 13th century by the Byzantine grammarian Massimo Planude (1255-1305
CE) – was similarly a belated composite combining time-honored hearsay and incidents pilfered from the lives of others.

An Italian version of Planude’s biography translated by Giulio Landi and published in Venice in 1545 is instanced in Collection 13, as is a deftly illustrated incunabula Latin edition of Aesop dating from 1486 and originating from the library of the renowned 18th-century Danish bibliophile, Count Otto Thott.

The Roman dramatist Terence was another classical author whose work had remained familiar since antiquity, but competing early modern editions of his comedies proved the difficulty of transposing his deceptive Latin metre to the printed page. Collection 13 offers a range of versions of Terence, including a 1644 Leiden edition incorporating the commentary of Aelius Donatus, the 4th-century Roman grammarian who once tutored St Jerome, a 1651 Amsterdam copy of an edition by the English scholar Thomas Farnaby (1575-1647), as well as a 1539 Lyon edition featuring the annotations of both Erasmus (1466-1536) and of the prominent German Lutheran and scholar Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560).

Other Erasmus contributions found in Collection 13 include a Basel, 1524 Greek and Latin parallel text edition of Euripides’ Hecuba and Iphigenia at Aulis, as well as a 1507 Aldine Press version of the same Latin translation appended by his own classical imitation, Ode de laudibus Britanniæ.

Moving to the late 16th century, one further highlight of early modern classical scholarship featured is a 1680 Utrecht edition of the poetry of Catullus, Tibullus and Propertius first published in 1577 by the formidable French scholar Joseph Justus Scaliger (1540-1609). This anthology was one of a handful of landmark editions Scaliger published during the 1570s which sought to deepen, rationalize and consolidate procedure in textual criticism.

In addition to holding a range of classical texts, it’s common for Early European Books collections to exhibit a share of medieval works in print form, and Collection 13 is no exception. Although beginning with a 1498 Lyon incunable edition of Boethius’s seminal 6th-century The Consolation of Philosophy which once belonged to William Morris, the medieval highlights here tend to focus around writings of the 13th and 14th centuries.

Among these number philosophical and spiritual disquisitions by the canonised Albertus Magnus (1200-1280), the Franciscan student of Duns Scotus, Antonius Andreae (1280-1320), and works by the 14th-century logician Albert of Saxony such as a 1490 Paris edition of his Sophismata, concerning problems in language. Collection 13 also presents two 1665 Copenhagen editions of the Edda Islandorum, better known in English as the Prose Edda. Originally compiled by the Icelandic scholar Snorri Storluson (1179-1241) in around 1220, the work remains an essential cornerstone to our knowledge of Old Norse literature and Viking myth.

In the meantime, what became the supreme text of Italian and late medieval literature – Dante’s Divine Comedy (completed in 1320) – is also nicely represented here. Two editions of Dante’s verse narrative are present. The first was published in Venice in 1568 with extensive
commentary by critic and poet Bernardino Daniello da Lucca (c.1500-1565), the second is a 1578 Venice version combining the commentaries of two earlier editions by Florentine humanist Christoforo Landino (1424-1498) and by Alessandro Vellutello (b.1473). This second volume also offers fine illustrations from Vellutello’s original 1544 Francesco Marcolini printing, possibly by the German engraver Giovanni Britto. Aided in part by early modern scholarly editions like these, in time Dante’s Divine Comedy stepped from the Middle Ages to take its place among the masterpieces of world literature.

A different kind of narrative that survived medieval times was the real-life one that told of the secret love affair between the 12th-century French theologian Peter Abelard and the abbess Héloïse d’Argenteuil. Although what first brought the couple fame was the posthumous survival of their original Latin correspondence, the romantic appeal of their relationship to future generations sparked a minor literary industry which – for the sake of amusement – embellished or in some cases simply counterfeited their epistolary exchanges. An instance of this kind of literary imposture can be found in Collection 13’s Les amours d'Abailard & d'Heloïse, a 1695 Amsterdam edition printed by Pierre Chayer which brings Jacques Allius’s (d.1688) original 1675 fictionalised text of that name together with embroidered French translations of Abelard’s letters mainly worked up by the author Nicolas Rémond des Cours (d.1716).

The correspondence of Abelard and Héloïse may have suffered appropriation, but Héloïse’s outspoken letters in particular are also known to have served as a model for future literary genres such as the epistolary novel and even the Bildungsroman. For all its apparent preoccupation with the classical past and with classical literary conventions, the early modern period was in fact one in which a multitude of new, aberrant and illicit literary forms began to propagate.

Similarly, the considerable variety of classical writings in translation made available at the time registered not just the existence of an uncloistered reading public seeking access to these texts, but the reality of a print culture ready to champion literature written in the modern vernacular. Collection 13 demonstrates this movement with works by some of the greatest early modern writers from a generous handful of European countries. The Italian Petrarch (1304-1374), for example, was through his scholarship an early catalyst of humanism, while his innovative vernacular lyric poetry made the eponymous Petrarchan sonnet a template to be imitated by poets throughout Europe.

The current collection features a 1492 Venice printing of his Epistolae familiares, a selection of letters chosen by the author which includes the famous account of his ascent of Mont Ventoux, a key text taken to presage the new spirit of the Renaissance. Works of other great Italian writers found in Collection 13 number 16th-century Venice printings of Decameron author Giovanni Boccaccio’s (1313-1375) Latin writings in Italian translation, a 1580 edition of Ariosto’s (1474-1533) Orlando furioso, a 1581 Mantua printing of Tasso’s (1544-1595) first major work Il Rinaldo, as well as items by less familiar figures such as poets Lodovico Adimari (1644-1708) and Gabriello Chiabrera (1552-1638), sometimes known as ‘the Italian Pindar’. Among other Italian-language items of interest are Giambattista Giraldi’s (1504-1573) literary critical Discorsi (Venice, 1554) and a 1638 Rome text, Dialoghi piaceuoli, translated from the Spanish by Italian philologist Lorenzo Franciosini (born c.1600) and bound with a Spanish/Italian Grammatica.
Items from Spain itself are centered around works from the Golden Age of Spanish theatre, although one curiosity is a nicely illustrated 1699 Amsterdam Dutch translation of Cervantes’ (1547-1616) Don Quixote, the work widely regarded as the first modern novel. Another Dutch translation from the Spanish is a 1654 Amsterdam edition of La vida es sueño by the dramatist Pedro Calderón de la Barca (1600-1681). In the original Spanish, Collection 13 also presents a 1635 Madrid edition of the comedies of Tirso de Molina (1579-1648), as well as a 1626 Zaragoza printing of the comedies of Spain’s greatest playwright of the period, Lope de Vega (1562-1635). A book of his verse, La Circe con otras rimas y prosas, can also be found in a Madrid edition dating from 1624.

French drama of the 17th century is represented by editions of plays by Pierre Corneille (1606-1684), including a 1688 Paris copy of his comedy La Place royale and a 1695 Amsterdam text written for the early opera, Medée, by his brother Thomas Corneille (1625-1709) and set to music by Charpentier. Dutch translations of the comedies of Molière (1622-1673) also feature, as well as Amsterdam editions of the tragedy Alcibiade by Jean Galbert de Campistron (1656-1723) and of the libretto he wrote for Alcide, another early opera, this time by Lully and Marin Marais. Two examples of the libretti of Louise-Geneviève Gillot de Saintoge (1650-1718) are also presented, including a 1694 text of Desmarests’ music-tragedy Didon, the first work co-written by a female author to be performed at France’s Royal Academy of Music. French prose is ably exemplified by a two-volume edition of Rabelais (1494-1553) dating from 1675, while a highlight of French poetry is a 1699 Amsterdam edition of Contes et nouvelles en vers by La Fontaine (1621-1695).

Drama from the Netherlands is also strongly represented. A 1644 Amsterdam collection brings together the ribald plays of poet and playwright Gerbrand Adriaenszoon Bredero (1585-1618), not least his most famous comedy, The Farce of the Cow (De klucht van de koe), first performed in 1612. Other highlights are two early 17th-century editions of Iphigenia by Samuel Coster (1579-1665), numerous works by the leading dramatist and poet Joost van den Vondel (1587-1679), and a 1648 copy of Medea, another dramatic rendering of the story of the sorceress from Greek myth, this time by Jan Six (1618-1700), a distinguished magistrate, playwright and cultural lynchpin of the Dutch Golden Age.

Works of prose and of poetry from the Netherlands include an illustrated Dutch version of Erasmus’s Moriae encomium (In Praise of Folly) dating from 1700, a 1678 pamphlet publication of poet and publisher Katharyne Lescailje’s (1649-1711) De zeegepraalende vreede, as well as a variety of works by poet, composer and diplomat Constantijn Huygens (1596-1687). Items of note from other countries include the court poetry of Danish rector Albert Bartholin (1620-1663), and a 1635 Copenhagen edition of Zwo Comoedien by his compatriot, the poet, dramatist and mathematician Hans Lauremberg (1590-1658).

From Germany further court poetry is featured by Adam Friedrich Werner (1600-1672), as well as examples of 17th-century news books by Georg Greflinger (1620-1677), a writer who became the first early modern equivalent to a newspaper editor in the German-speaking world.
Among other highlights and curiosities, Collection 13 also contains a 1606 London printing of a short work by the Anglo-Welsh poet, the self-styled John Davies of Hereford (1565-1618), and a 1673 Dutch translation of verse by Simon Simonides (1558-1629), sometimes known as ‘the Polish Pindar’.

Collection 13 also features a 1643 edition of Sir Francis Bacon’s influential Nova Atlantis, first published in 1627. Written in Latin, the work is an incomplete utopian novel in the manner of Sir Thomas More which mixes a nascent novelistic approach with travel narrative and elements of political, religious and philosophical discourse. As such, Bacon’s text is a reminder that the early modern period’s new literary genres – whether they be in prose, drama or poetry – emerged not fully formed but often in states of pliant development and uncommon crossover.

A related aspect of early modern literature which Collection 13 helps to capture is the background of the eclectic literary marketplace whose immediacy and restive spirit print culture brought into being. Through an extensive range of short works, pamphlets and news books, Collection 13 underlines the co-existence of longer and perhaps more considered writings with the noisy, diverting and fleeting texts that circulated in great abundance. These items demonstrate again the equivocal nature of much literature of the period and of the environment in which it evolved, caught sometimes not just between genres but also somewhere between fact and fancy. Short works would offer all manner of information and entertainment, from play advertisements and doggerel verse to reports of voyages, battles and natural disasters to transcripts of letters, prognostications and political lobbying.

Among the multifarious items to be discovered are a “true and exact relation” of the 1669 Mount Etna eruption published in both Dublin and London during the same year, and a 1637 pamphlet, Tooneel van flora, which playfully considers the pros and cons of the burgeoning Dutch tulip trade. One curiosity also featured – complete with an endearing bird illustration – is a 1695 poem presented in English, Dutch and French in praise of a robin red-breast “famous for singing every day on the top of queen Mary's mausoleum” in London’s Westminster Abbey, and written perhaps as a way of intimating Catholic allegiances. Of more specific interest is a wealth of material from Holland relating to the English Civil War (1642-1651), relaying proclamations and letters by a variety of its leading protagonists including the conflict’s first historian, Edward Hyde, the 1st Earl of Clarendon, Charles Fleetwood, the executed Royalist preacher Christopher Love and Oliver Cromwell.