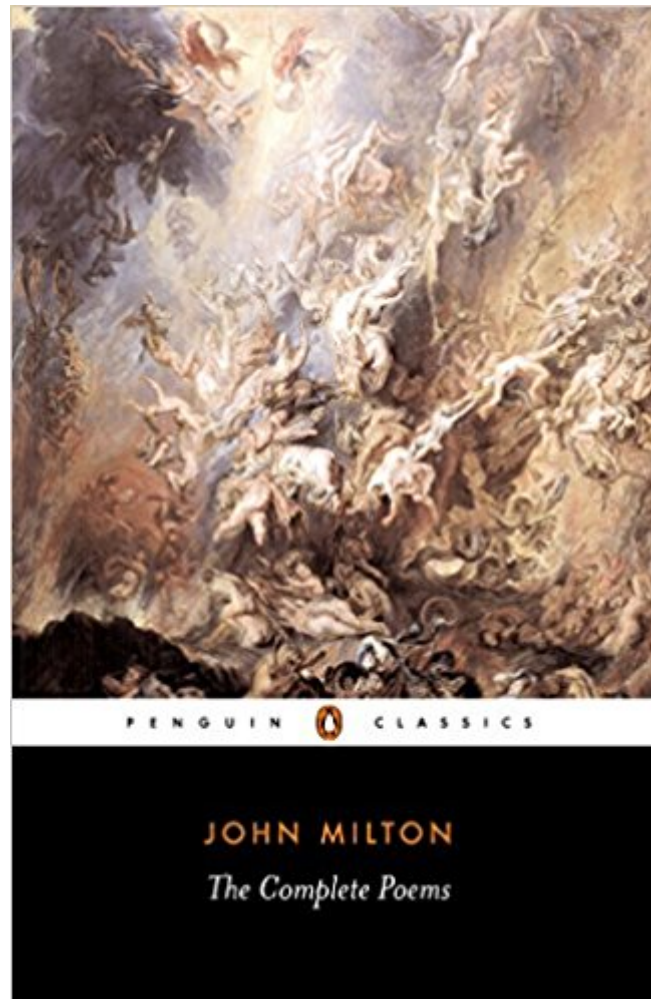


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# The Complete Poems (Penguin Classics)



## Synopsis

"I may assert Eternal Providence  
And justify the ways of God to men" John Milton was a master of almost every type of verse, from the classical to the religious and from the lyrical to the epic. His early poems include the devotional 'On the Morning of Christ's Nativity', 'Comus', a masque, and the pastoral elegy 'Lycidas'. After Cromwell's death and the dashing of Milton's political hopes, he began composing *Paradise Lost*, which reflects his profound understanding of politics and power. Written when Milton was at the height of his abilities, this great masterpiece fuses the Christian with the classical in its description of the fall of Man. In *Samson Agonistes*, Milton's last work, the poet draws a parallel with his own life in the hero's struggle to renew his faith in God. In this edition of the *Complete Poems*, John Leonard draws attention to words coined by Milton and those that have changed their meaning since his time. He also provides full notes to elucidate Biblical, classical and historical allusions and has modernized spelling, capitalization and punctuation. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

## Book Information

Series: Penguin Classics

Paperback: 864 pages

Publisher: Penguin Classics (May 1, 1999)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0140433635

ISBN-13: 978-0140433630

Product Dimensions: 5.1 x 1.8 x 7.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.4 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (12 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #595,729 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #132 in [Books > Literature & Fiction > Poetry > Regional & Cultural > European > German](#) #861 in [Books > Literature & Fiction > British & Irish > Poetry](#) #125592 in [Books > Religion & Spirituality](#)

## Customer Reviews

John Milton has long been recognized as the greatest poet in English after Shakespeare and a

world literature treasure. Many of his short poems are perennially put among the greatest lyrics, especially "Lycidas" and his ground-breaking sonnets, which revolutionized the form and were immensely influential with sonneteers like William Wordsworth and Percy Shelley. He is of course most famous for *Paradise Lost*, his masterpiece; the greatest epic poem in English, it is rivaled only by Dante's *Divine Comedy* as the best modern epic. *Paradise Regained*, its mini-epic sequel, and the dramas *Comus* and *Samson Agonistes* are also among his legendary works. Besides all this, Milton's prose remains important and widely read, particularly his political work. Many things make Milton great, not least that he is one of the few poets able to successfully combine beauty, artistry, and depth. He is usually considered the most learned English poet and was indeed among the most educated people of his day, perhaps of all time - a fearsomely well-read polyglot steeped in theology, philosophy, literature, science, and more. This has unfortunately kept many from reading him, but there is really nothing to fear; his intellect of course shows up but far more subtly than one would expect. Unlike Modernist writers with similar reputations, he is not obscure or massively allusive; nearly all his references are to the Bible and classical mythology sources that his readers would have immediately recognized. This is of course not as true now, but Milton remains remarkably readable for a poet of three hundred and fifty years' vintage - far more so, for instance, than Shakespeare.

This review compares the Kindle editions of *The Complete Poems* (Penguin Classics) (edited by John Leonard), and *The Complete Poetry and Essential Prose of John Milton* (Modern Library). The samples weren't enough to decide between them, so I bought both - and now have to decide which one to return (before the week's up). It's a bigger dilemma than I thought! In short, I find that the Penguin has the best notes, by far, but on every other count the presentation is inferior, in parts defective. The Modern Library edition scores in offering some prose (and I would really only need a selection of the shorter poems, too); in giving introductions to each piece or group of pieces; in its generous introductory material; and in the presentation, which shows rare sympathy with the Kindle format. Navigation is easy, with multiple options, and the Kindle's 'Go To' function is full and allows total access (e.g. to individual books of *Paradise Lost*). All the defects I could find in the Penguin I have reported through the 'Report Content Error' function on the Kindle, but they include things like setting the prose 'Arguments' at the start of each book of *Paradise Lost* as verse, or inserting a stanza break every five lines through the whole poem. And when you find 'the' misprinted as 'die', you know you can't trust the text! No prose is a fair enough editorial choice (though if you have the COMPLETE poems, why not some prose as well?

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