



Hyperion

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Ever since the composition of *Paradise Lost*, English poets with epic ambitions have written under the shadow of Milton. *Hyperion*, Keats's effort along the Miltonic line, is powerful and extraordinary but a tour de force that he could not sustain.

As the poem begins, most of its action has already taken place. Saturn and the other Titans, with the sole exception of Hyperion, god of the sun, have been replaced by Jupiter and his fellow Olympians. Thus what occurs is not the issue. The questions to be raised are how and why benevolent gods have been overthrown. The difficulty of offering good answers combined with the static nature of the story to make *Hyperion* virtually impossible to complete.

Book I depicts, in sculptural detail, the throneless Saturn, whom Keats envisions as majestic, powerful, and beautiful--in fact, so thoroughly divine that it would be hard to imagine his superior. The second book brings Saturn to the gathering place of the Titans. Here, the deposed gods voice reasons for, and responses to, their great change of state. Oceanus, former ruler of the sea, advances the most convincing argument. The Titans are guiltless, he acknowledges, yet they have been superseded by beings yet more excellent--in a natural progression.

Book III bears out Oceanus' claim by presenting the young Apollo, who has not yet replaced Hyperion but who feels an aching eagerness to assume his divinity. Mnemosyne, the Titan goddess of memory, shows Apollo what he has not yet realized, that suffering and destruction precede creation, that life is change. This tragic "knowledge enormous" makes a god of Apollo, and the fragment breaks off as he undergoes his apotheosis.

Attempting to complete the poem, Keats transformed *Hyperion* into *The Fall of Hyperion*. In revising, he moved away from the influence of Milton and toward that of Dante. *The Fall of Hyperion* begins with an allegorical vision in which a dreaming poet enters a temple where the goddess Moneta reveals the story of Hyperion to him. Again, however, the epic remained unfinished.

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