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A. J. A. Waldock
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PARADISE LOST
AND ITS CRITICS

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BY

A. J. A. WALDOCK



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PREFACE

ONE of the notable events of contemporary criticism has been the rediscovery of *Paradise Lost*: one might almost say the discovery of it, so new have been some of the viewpoints taken, so fresh some of the significances gathered. Any such accumulation of comment brings with it the need, sooner or later, for a scrutiny of its processes, and it is with such a scrutiny that this book is very largely concerned. It is an attempt to assess the validity of some of the most important among recent critical interpretations of the poem.

I naturally make at the same time my own efforts to reach the truth about *Paradise Lost*; and here one deceptively simple question seems recurrent: the question of what, at this important juncture or that, is really *happening* in the poem. It is strange, perhaps, that there should be debate about what goes on—about what really takes place—in a work so clear to all appearance in outline, and of so ringing a definiteness in expression, as *Paradise Lost*. But there is debate. Critics differ not only in their approach to the poem, in their feeling about it, in their judgement of it: they differ also in their understanding of what occurs in it. The question, wherever it appears, is obviously fundamental.

I have to thank my colleagues in the English Department at Sydney University, first and chiefly Mr R. G. Howarth, then Dr A. G. Mitchell and Mr H. J. Oliver, for much helpful advice and comment. I owe a similar debt, despite profound differences of feeling, to my former colleague, Professor I. R. Maxwell, now of Melbourne; and to Professor S. Musgrove, of Auckland University College, I am grateful for the clarification and the stimulus that come from friendly but energetic controversy.

A. J. A. W.