

THE HAZARD OF MODERN POETRY. By Erich Heller. (Bowes and Bowes; 6s.)

On the whole, people do what they enjoy doing. The enjoyment sometimes takes perverse forms—delight in grumbling, in being ill, in reforming other people's lives, in contemplating disaster—and in such cases the enjoyers will deny that they draw any pleasure from these activities; but the pleasure is discernible none the less.

In this essay, Professor Heller undertakes an analysis of the poet's situation today, tracing, through the history of ideas since the Reformation and Renaissance, through Pascal, Hölderlin, Goethe, Nietzsche, Rilke, the Symbolists, and Mr T. S. Eliot, the present hazard of poetry as he conceives it, dogged by 'the persistent closeness of despair', where 'our faith and our physics are fascinated by the vast voids inside and outside everything that exists', and 'uncertainty alone is ineluctably real', the last phrase recurring in the dialogue between Speaker and dissenting Listener with which the book closes.

Nothingness or nihilism has, as Professor Heller emphasizes, had a good run. Yet in so far as artists or thinkers (which is perhaps the same thing) worship it as Mallarmé did, or shudder away from it in fascinated horror as Pascal did, or explore it like Nietzsche, or exhibit it like Mr Eliot, they are not victims of their time, as Professor Heller seems to suggest. They are enjoying themselves perversely. To hang by his heels over the abyss is not a useful pleasure for the poet; nor for the critic either. Among the intellectually aware, connivance at pleasure in nothingness (of which Valéry interestingly accuses Pascal) is the root of the problem, and it is this which Professor Heller's essay does not touch, so busy is it in recording the dark emptiness of the modern scene. The result is that the work has considerable verbal brilliance and a striking insubstantiality (in this it resembles *The Cocktail Party*) which in its preoccupation with nothingness make it seem already slightly out-of-date. Other forms of enjoyment in poetry seem to be breaking out in various places; perhaps nothing is not so important after all.

ELIZABETH SEWELL

LE LIVRE DES ANGES. By Erik Petersen. Translated into French by Claire Champollion. (Desclée de Brouwer.)

Angels sang at the birth of Christ; and they grieved with him in Gethsemane. They guarded his tomb when he rose from the dead and spoke his epilogue when he rose into heaven. Angels fell, say some theologians, because he chose to become a man and not one of them.

But, of course, in becoming a man he becomes a creature; and once that is said, the Incarnation appears significant to those creatures who

are angels. In him, by him and through him all creatures, from the humblest mineral to the shining Seraphim, give glory to God.

Glory is given to God by adoration and this is the first duty and the sole prerogative of intelligent creatures. Only one creature can adore God comprehensively and he is Christ; the human and angelic creations adore God adequately only in so far as they are engrafted by grace to the Son of God.

Accordingly Erik Petersen, in his very fine book, sees the angels as being at one with the Saints in the adoration of the glorified Christ in heaven. Such adoration is the supreme achievement of the Church. It is the liturgy of the Mystical Body triumphant. The liturgy of the Mystical Body militant is, argues Petersen, a participation by the Church on earth in the liturgy of the angels in heaven; and, conversely, the angels participate in the worship of the Church on earth. They assist at Baptism, at Mass, in the Divine Office and in prayer. They are the official worshippers of God in the society of heaven, and their participation in the liturgy of the Church . . . 'expriment ce fait que c'est un cult officiel qui est rendu à Dieu'.

Angels are now one with men in Christ. For the glory of God, which Isaias saw as worshipped by angels through their great Trisagion, has departed from the temple of the Jews and now dwells in the temple of the Body of Jesus. And him whom we salute at Mass in time, the angels worship in heaven as the Lamb who is slain before the foundations of the world.

ALAN KEENAN, O.F.M.

THE ANNOTATOR. By Alan Keen and Roger Lubbock. (Putnam; 21s.)

During the past ten years a certain amount of conjecture has arisen regarding a copy of Hall's *Chronicle* of 1550, in the possession of Mr Alan Keen, which contains 406 annotations in a contemporary hand; and it has been suggested that these were made by William Shakespeare when studying the reigns of Richard II, Henry IV, V and VI for his cycle of history plays. In 1949 there appeared a brief preliminary report by Moray McLaren, entitled *By Me*, and with the present volume the theory is carried a stage further.

It is certain that the annotations are in an Elizabethan hand; it is almost certain that Shakespeare knew and used Hall as a source book. So much may be granted. The marginalia consist for the most part of the sort of headings a student would make on first 'getting up' a subject. Of Henry V, for instance, we find: '9th. of aprile 1405 henry the Vthe beganne to reign . . . all flatterers and olde companions banisshid X myle from the courte . . . sage counsellors chosen . . . he beganne to reforme bothe the clergie and the layte', and so on. Only rarely does a