THE EMPEROR'S CLOTHES. Kathleen Nott. (Indiana University Press, $1.75).

T. S. ELIOT: A COLLECTION OF CRITICAL ESSAYS. Hugh Kenner. (Spectrum, $1.95).

The Emperor's Clothes is the most important book about Eliot yet written, and will probably remain so. (It is about Eliot, despite the efforts of some critics against others literary-religious revivals such as C. S. Lewis, Dorothy Sayers, Graham Greene, and T. E. Hulme.) It is the only book which pulls Eliot up by the roots and shows us what the reading public never sees: the medieval angle of religious fanaticism, scholastic dogma, rule-ship politics, and Culture. It is a cold and lethal document.

Hugh Kenner, on the other hand, has put together an Eliot prayerbook for the faithful. The nineteen oldish essays in the collection blend like a professional choir. Each essayist, of course, occupies his little niche in the cathedral porch, though one or two (S. Musgrove and Donald Davie) are apt to behave like little devils, even in the presence of the Master. Reading the two books together, one sees all over again the frightening abyss between natural or humanistic art and High Art, between science and religion, democracy and totalitarianism, logic and mysticism, freedom and authority.

Kathleen Nott, in attacking dogma itself, sells Eliot like a tree:

All dogma, in fact, including, and especially the dogma of Original Sin, divorces us from real and natural morality, which can only be taught us by personal and individual love, generally experienced early and unconsciously. If we cannot learn our morality from that reality, we shall learn it from another: hate.

To Eliot and his followers Christianity has meant the religion of Sin, not the religion of Love. In consequence, his life-long literary endeavor has been to acculturate modern man to his conception of religion and its wide range of fears and hates. Henry Miller speaks of "the scholar's hatred for humanity"—a necessary exaggeration. Eliot's devotees are scholars in this sense, the deadwood of society trying every method, no matter how septic or antiquated, to preserve their cultural power under the sanctions of religious dogma. Hugh Kenner actually quotes this in his introduction: "Deadness," wrote Wyndham Lewis in 1914 in a book Eliot admired, "is the first condition of art..."

Let me briefly annotate some of the essays in the Kenner book:

Arthur Mizener: unadulterated adulation of the method by which Eliot transmitted his "personal and private agonies" into the impersonal.

Wyndham Lewis: slightly amusing anecdotes.


S. Musgrove: one of the best detectives in the grove unveils surprising similarities between Eliot and Tennyson's...

G. L. K. Morris: a gentlemanly expose of the in The Waste Land, not mentioned in Eliot's "Notes...

F. R. Leavis: a trenchantly explicating of The Waste Land... Allen Tate: a desperate attempt to isolate the poet... (Ash Wednesday in this case) from its own in psychological device, an invention of Eliot's, leaves... to engage in culture politics without assuming any... for his actions. The poet is "pure."

R. P. Blackmur: further apologies of way of exploiting the key terms in Eliot's criticism.

Ezra Pound: a self-congratulatory toast to Eliot. Hugh Kenner: Mr. Kenner has a way of assenting to more vicious forms of Eliot's behavior. "Miss Allen... who's responsibility it was to develop for the first time of Mrs. Guzzard in The Confidential Clerk, has a producer's concern to admonish the cast, before a... which the author was to be present, that they... account to ask the author about the meaning of any... Donal Davie: he indicts "The Dry Salvages" for its... writing as a way of proving that the "incompetence be dazzling virtuosity!"—Kathleen Nott is mentioned as a "secular liberal."

The opposite of secular is theological, and Miss Not... through the theological wastes to the point at which it is into mystical belief, of course, no one can challenge in every detail his version of the "dissonance" as a split between thought and feeling and... the split between science and theology. She denies the existence of Two Truths, one truth for science and... religion. She relates Eliot's "Classicism" to ethics and to revive and expand the monastic teaching orders... on his negative attitude toward women and... the poor.

She takes his disciples to task for furthering anti-literary criticism and esthetics, and flirting with the various forms of authoritarianism in the social order. She denounces the neo-scholastic hatred of the Renaissance and... She convicts Eliot and his set of failure to understand... and its deep influence on European culture.

In short, she leaves no stone unturned. Her writing is incisive, and at times ringing. The poetry she leaves behind is a kind of humor that survives only in England, the poetry to the skies when it is mentioned, leaving... seated on his throne, the legs of which have been... once and for all.