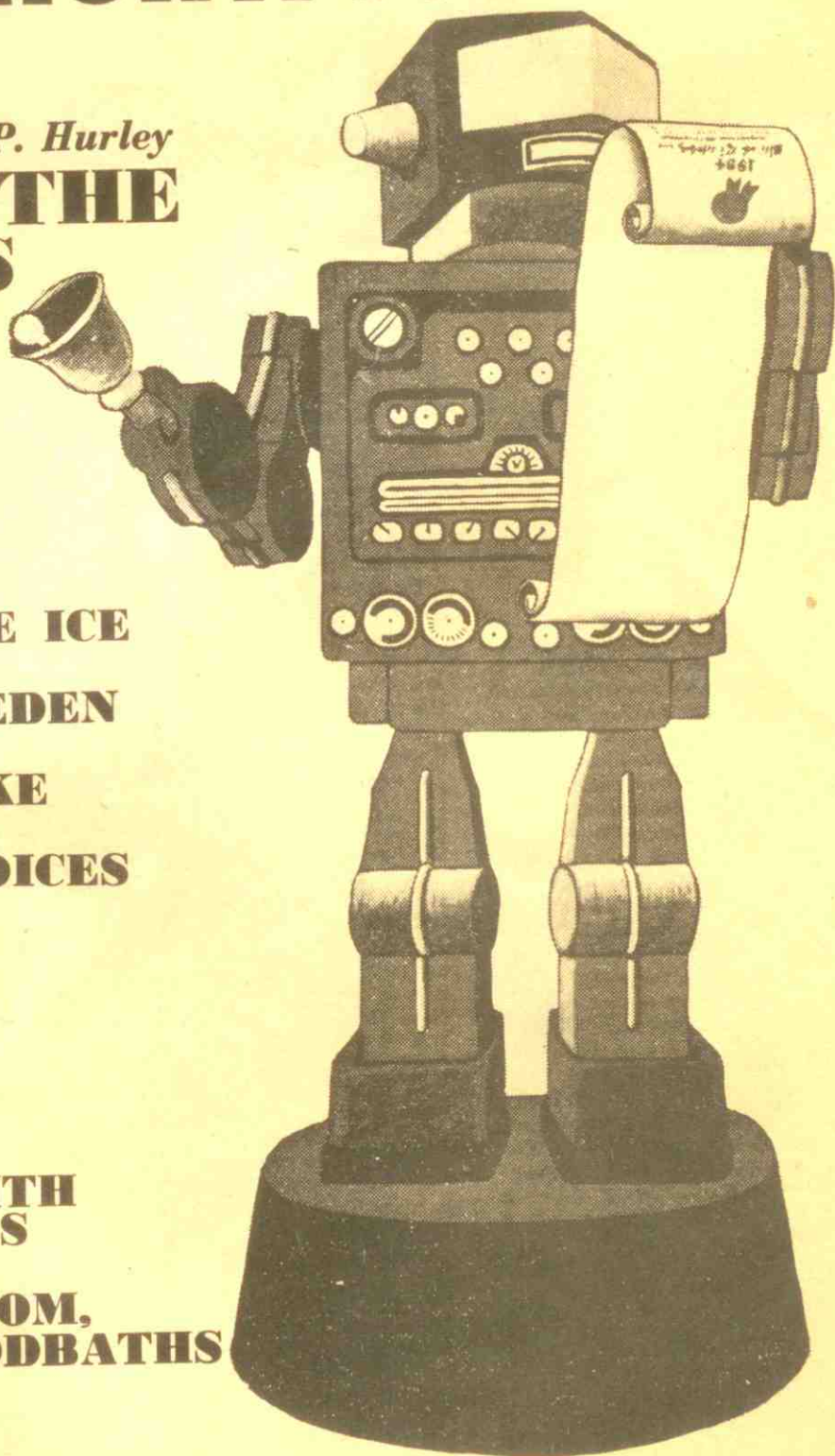


# Commonweal

## **THE COMING OF THE HUMANOIDS**

*Neil P. Hurley*



**HANDS ACROSS THE ICE**  
R. F. NEILL

**INNOCENTS IN SWEDEN**  
PHILIP NOBILE

**TENANTS ON STRIKE**  
NICOLAUS C. MILLS

**CRITICS' BOOK CHOICES  
FOR CHRISTMAS**

- WILFRID SHEED
- WILLIAM PFAFF
- WILSON C. McWILLIAMS
- RICHARD NEUHAUS
- JOSH GREENFELD
- RICHARD ELMAN
- MAURICE BERUBE
- SALLY CUNNEEN
- WALTER ARNOLD

**AN INTERVIEW WITH  
JOYCE CAROL OATES**  
LINDA KUEHL

**DEFENDING FREEDOM,  
PREVENTING BLOODBATHS**  
PETER STEINFELS

CRITICS' Book Choices  
**Richard Elman**

All of the notebooks of Dostoevsky thus far published by the University of Chicago Press under the editorship of Edward Wasiolek have been worth their considerable expense (\$12.50), but, of the lot, I have thus far found those to

*The Possessed* most useful to my own concerns as a novelist. For one thing they re-educate one to the meaning of plot in the psychological novel. Dostoevsky saw event as emotion, twists of plot as alternatives to emotions he could not bring himself to feel. This most visionary of writers was surely one of the most pragmatic: he tried out everything in his notebooks and discarded what he did not *feel* could push his plot along emotionally. It is by now trite to say that Dostoevsky wrote out of his

despair. What the notebooks show is how—and so poignantly—through being faithful to that emotion one can begin to structure a novel.

I have been deeply moved by the novels of William Butler for quite a number of years. At one time, I learned much from them. Butler is an American writer who has lived a good part of his life in Japan. His best fiction has been published in England. This winter Scribners has published his masterpiece, *The House at Akiya* (\$4.95). It is a sparse, intense, queer work of art about the disintegration of a personality. Butler's restraint is not the absence of emotion. It is the mood through which that absence is noticed and felt.

A book that sticks in the mind, too, is Morris Renek's novel, *Siam Miami* (Macmillan, \$6.95). In Renek, New York has found its Dickens. *Siam Miami* is seemingly familiar material—the struggle of a pop singer to become a woman when pitted against some lecherous greedy promoters, producers etc—but Renek's vision is larger than the emblem of a girl with a wiggling fanny used to advertise his book might suggest: he is writing about buying and selling (the American religion) with ribaldry, gusto, and wit so that, almost magically, caricature is transformed into drama, and something about human possibility is affirmed that is not at all sentimental.

Finally, I should like to put in an outright plug for the novels and poems of Gilbert Sorrentino, a writer who continues to impress me immensely. His novel, *The Sky Changes* (Hill & Wang, \$3.95), is the best fiction of divorce I have ever come across, truly moving shattering experience, and a shame that it is so little known; and this year, as always, I find myself hoping that somebody will call attention to his poems which are shaped, moving, honest experiences, each and every one. Next to Ginsberg I know of no poet of his generation who comes close to his power, his language, his unforced rhythms, and lacerating feelings. I am reading him now again. I hope I shall be reading him some more in future in a large collected edition.