

PAPERBOUNDS

FLASH OF THE SPIRIT: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy. By Robert Farris Thompson. Vintage, 1984. 317 pp. \$9.95

Anyone doubting the legitimacy of the term *Afro-American* should read this book. Thompson, a Yale art historian, traces the influence of five West African tribal groups (Yoruba, Kongo, Fon, Mande, and Ejagham) on the culture and folkways of Afro-Americans throughout the Western Hemisphere. Some links between the Old World and the New are direct: Clay or concrete images of Elegba, a Yoruba deity, guard thresholds of hundreds of black homes and meeting places throughout the United States, particularly in New York City and Miami. From the Kongo came herbalism, mental healing, and funeral customs adopted by black Americans in the Deep South. Many influences are subtle, such as the attitude of "cool," or *itutu*, a calm demeanor, which was hailed among the Yoruba as the mark of nobility and grace. From music to textile design, whether in Havana or Harlem, African civilization has proved to be what Thompson lauds as "one of the great migration styles in the history of the planet."

ENEMIES OF PROMISE. By Cyril Connolly. Persea, 1984. 265 pp. \$6.95

First published in 1938, this book was intended by its author, one of England's foremost literary critics, as an "inquiry into the problem of how to write a book which lasts 10 years." It is a curious and brilliant amalgam. In the first part, Connolly (1903-74) conducts a synoptic tour of the dominant writers of early 20th-century Western literature. His main theme, and the subject of his lament, is

the passing of the leisurely "mandarin" style, last created by such masters as Henry James. The culprit, and Connolly's nemesis, is journalism—the art of writing "what will be grasped at once." But the road to decline is full of detours, last ditch stands by such artful writers as Virginia Woolf against the straightforward prose of H. G. Wells and G. B. Shaw, and the shorn, understated writing of Gertrude Stein and Ernest Hemingway. Connolly's judgments are sharp, sure, often iconoclastic. The second section of the book is an *autobiographia literaria*, full of glimpses into an English upper-middle-class childhood and education ("Yet Eton, like all public schools, had no solution for sex"). Mordantly self-deprecating, Connolly here shows himself to be as unforgiving of his own shortcomings as he was of bad books.

STATES OF MIND. By Jonathan Miller. Pantheon, 1984. 316 pp. \$7.95

This book is a series of illuminating "conversations with people who have devoted their lives to the task of making the human mind intelligible." Miller, an M.D., author, and stage director, interviews linguists, philosophers, anthropologists, neurologists, psychologists. Sir Stuart Hampshire, for instance, brings a philosopher's concern for semantic precision to his discussion of the distinctions among the conscious, unconscious, and preconscious. Anthropologist Clifford Geertz explains how the human brain may have evolved from that of a lower animal and why "there's no missing link to be found." In all the dialogues, Miller brings out not only what psychology has accomplished and could accomplish—but what it probably never will.