Edith Turner’s *The Spirit and the Drum* is an extraordinarily vivid account of African village life which is also a beautifully evocative record of a year spent with Victor Turner among the Ndembu. It is written with a directness and intensity that makes Victor’s own flamboyant literary style seem relatively staid. Edith Turner has not written a confessional text in the fashionable style but an artful recreation of what was evidently a profound emotional experience.

Another reviewer has remarked, with justice, on the eroticism that, in Edith Turner’s description, pervades Ndembu culture. This characteristic seems to be bound up with the great ritual complexes Ndembu have constructed about male initiation and female fertility. What also comes forcefully across in Edith’s narrative is the pervasive presence of Spirit in numberless forms, both benign and sinister: embodied deities, enchanted birds, invisible pythons that kill real people. One is constantly reminded, in a series of strange and startling events, of Victor’s comment in his study of Ndembu divination that African spirituality is embedded in materiality, defying Aristotelian and Cartesian analysis.

Edith Turner has produced, in this relatively short book, much more than an interesting footnote to her late husband’s magnificent oeuvre on Ndembu society and culture. Here is a genuinely new voice in anthropology, adding importantly to our understanding of the great Mukanda ritual of male circumcision among the Ndembu, and evoking as never before the strange quality of African sociality. And her text abounds in sudden insights:

> Shaking, possession and trance take place up and down the continent of Africa, out in the black Americas, and all over the nontheological world. They start with submission and the loss of self; then in an unexpected moment comes the arrival of spirit, in great happiness and freedom; afterwards comes the two gifts, which are clairvoyance, such as Manyosa experienced, and healing... The neurobiologists understand the internal spillover effect, but they still have work to do explaining the miracles. (p. 103).

Let us hope we shall hear more from this late-emerging anthropological talent.
On the Edge of the Bush usefully displays the more important milestones marking Victor Turner’s long journey of discovery. As Edith Turner’s fine biographical Prologue makes clear, Victor’s anthropology was a passionate vocation, an unceasing search for the healing vision which would bring together the aspects of our common human nature which modern civilization has set asunder.

In relation to ideas and theoretical systems Turner was an unashamed eclectic. The first part of this book, whose title is a reference to what Turner would have called the “liminal space” where cosmological drama is acted out, shows the author applying his interpretive skill to ethnographic materials from such diverse sources as central Africa, tribal India, Brazil and ancient Ireland.

Part Two of this constructed volume demonstrates the dialectical counterpoint which preoccupied much of Turner’s later career, after he had finished his account of the workings of “archaic” society with the Ndembu people of northern Zambia as privileged exemplars, and had moved from Britain to North America. Modern drama, Turner believed, was the analogue and counterpart of “archaic” ritual. The common purpose of both was to simultaneously destroy and create anew a social and cultural reality. This transformative experience reached its apotheosis in the moment of what Turner called communitas, a shared experience of pure being and oneness.

This discovery of what he claimed was a distinctive and universal mark of human-ness became the central insight which organized all Turner’s later work. As the densely argued essays in the second part of this volume show, Turner scoured the pages of medieval and modern history and modern philosophy in pursuit of communitas and its meaning. Also described in these pages is Turner’s feat in translating the Ndembu ritual experience into New York street theatre (managed by his friend Richard Scheckner). It marked the final twist in the dialectical spiral connecting Turner’s field experience as a young anthropologist in Africa with his much later epiphany as an inspired prophet of a new humanistic culture.

The third part of this book bears witness to Turner’s endeavours, near the end of his life, to heal yet another division in human consciousness, that between our knowledge of innate and of cultural facts. It was characteristic of him to discard the bias inherent in his own formation as a socio-cultural anthropologist, and argue for the relevance of recent discoveries about the neurophysiology of the human brain.