Nacirema Tribe

The Nacirema Tribe seems to be a fictional culture that’s parodying American culture. It is just American spelt backwards. I was a bit annoyed reading the author describe brushing teeth, flossing, and going to dentist in such odd language. I think the author is doing that intentionally to demonstrate that this language is what we may use to describe other cultures, and comment on our own cultural biases that are found in our studies of other cultures.

It’s hard to look at these rituals that I do in my everyday life and place myself outside of them. If I had never used “hog hair” to clean my teeth it would be quite strange. I think if I was exposed to it having never done it at my age, I would be intrigued and might try it myself. I’m sure it would hurt like mad if I’d never brushed or flossed though.

The author mentions the idealization and perversion of beauty in our culture, and seeing how far back this was written, I was surprised it was as much a problem back then. I’m sure this has only gotten worse as time has gone on. But, from my perspective this is the norm and I would see it as such even if I was looking in from the outside.

In the Nacirema culture, individuals who are sick undergo a ritual known as “exorcising the devil.” If my perspective was that of him performing an exorcism by a medicine man, I would find it strange and superstitious. I wouldn’t trust it and I’d worry it wouldn’t be anywhere near as effective as modern medicine.

These customs do not appear strange or bizarre because they are deeply embedded in the tribe’s culture and belief system. They’ve grown up with these practices and have been taught to view them as essential for their well-being and spiritual health. Like any culture, what may seem unusual to an outsider is a matter of perspective and context.