

A Nacirema

Halloween

The Nacirema, a people group found on the continent of North America, were first studied by Horace Miner. Miner was fascinated by their mystic traditions and way of life. I was most interested in the ritual they take part in every reaping season. This reaping ritual known as “Olooeves” takes place over a whole month leading up to the one special day when the magic is at its most powerful. While most participate in the rituals with excitement, some completely stay away from the festivities. They will darken their dwellings in fear of necromancers and malevolent spirits. This ritual month has possibly the strangest traditions and festivities I have ever seen.

In the days leading up Olooeves groups will gather to light pyres near their arboretums, which seems odd and dangerous considering that if the pyres become too large the arboretum itself could burn. They will remain around these pyres for many hours chanting and roasting gelatinous masses on spits. Some prefer to have these masses completely blackened while some prefer them slightly roasted. There is often much debate on which is superior. While the pyres burn the children often galavant through the arboretums that have been planted and grown in such a way to make it confusing for those who enter. The children often take pride in who can make it in and out the fastest. Another crucial part of this ritual are the libations they take in. The children often consume a mixture of a fermented bean and “moo-juice” that has been heated to a preferable temperature. The adults, however, prefer fermented grains made into a liquid that the children are not allowed to have by any means. After some of the adults consume multiple of these fermented liquids they begin acting strangely. This ritual will continue on for many nights throughout the month and many will flock to participate.

Perhaps the most disturbing tradition leading up to Olloeeves is when the Nacirema gather at a temple in which they seek to feel like they are about to meet their god of death. Many fear this walk to and through the temple but seem to enjoy it nonetheless. I find this very peculiar as most denounce necromancers and their skills every other time of the year. The Nacirema will wait for hours at a time to take the ceremonial walk through the temple. The characteristics of these temples should be noted in great detail as well. The outsides are usually dark with no windows but have decorum with lanterns that display servants of the god of death. There are also minions of the temple's deity outside to begin the walk. The inside has many chambers that depict different aspects of everyday life as if it was run by the god of death and war itself. It is always dark with lanterns only used to guide the people to the next chamber. The servants on the inside will cloak themselves in corners and in holes that appear to be solid only to jump out in order to frighten those that walk by. Temples have many uses in the Nacirema culture; Miner described the temples of healing and the temples used for this Olloeeves ritual could not be more different. These temples are dark and covered in emblems of death and torture, but the people are willing and excited to go in. However, the temples of healing are bright and barren and the people avoid it at all costs. I find this especially strange as many would prefer healing and life to death but their reactions are completely different from that expectation. There are so many that choose to participate in this ritual that the temples are open for the whole month leading to Olloeeves, but they are packed up and torn down no more than three days after.

The pyre burning and the temple walks occur all month leading up to the actual night of Olloeeves. During the day on Olloeeves life for the Nacirema is business as usual, it is the same as any other day of the year but starting at sundown things take a turn. The children and adults

adorn themselves in an ensemble of robes and adornments. Some choose to paint their face using various powders, liquids and creams using a bundle of hair while others wear special masks that mimic the image of their social gods (which are distinctly different than their actual religious gods but are often held to a similar prestige). Their masks might also mimic the images of famous warriors and killers that they deem significant. The robes and adornments vary greatly from person to person but there are some similarities within smaller groups of people. Small children often wear robes that represent mythical characters and older children oftentimes wear coordinating robes that all relate to the others' robes. For the adult women there is the strange similarity of wanting to wear the least amount of fabric that is socially acceptable. They will often cover only the parts they are ashamed of and nothing else. Any other day of the year this would be looked upon as scandalous but on Olloeeves this is to be expected. The main celebration of Olloeeves is for the children. The children will march around to the dwellings of the village and demand goods from the adults residing in those dwellings. If the children do not receive the goods that were demanded then the adults of these residences are threatened by the children. Depending on the village, upwards of one hundred children may come to each residence on Olloeeves, so many prepare the goods beforehand. It is also very important to note that the children have no familiarity or connection of any kind with those they demand good from. They will also not seek out any relationship with them after Olloeeves but will likely return to that dwelling next Olloeeves. Some of the more mischievous children in the village will go around throwing materials that are typically used for cleaning one's body after excreting waste over trees outside the dwellings. They might also throw ovums of chickens at the dwellings. These acts annoy the villagers but it is not as serious as it would be if it was done on

another night than Olloeeves. Once the children have collected all the goods for the night they will often congregate at a designated dwelling to then barter for the other childrens' goods that were collected. Some of the goods have more value depending on how desirable it is. Once the time of trade has been completed and the children are satisfied with their reappings they will finally sleep.

Once the children have all gone to sleep the adults and those too old to go around and demand will congregate to drink, eat, and dance. They wear their ceremonial robes and often judge others to find the one with the best, most desirable robe choice that year. Oftentimes the adults will have consumed too much of the tonics and will make choices they might not like when the sunrises and the trance the tonic had on them has worn off. When the sun rises the day after Olloeeves the tone of the village will have completely changed, as if Olloeeves had never occurred.