
POETRY | FALL 2015

The Nacirema

By Joanna White

They baked their heads in ovens, this tribe in the land between the Yaqui and the Arawak. They pierced their lobes with metal spikes, dwelled in abodes made of wattle and daub. In their shrines, they rubbed teeth with hogshead bristles, scraped their legs and faces, filled charm-boxes with magic potions, rinsed the mouths of children out with soap. The fat, they starved, the thin they stuffed. Their ugly bodies, they washed with holy water in daily rites of ablution to stave off decay. It came anyway so they entered the temple, shed their clothes, watched white-clothed vestal maidens bustling from room to room until the medicine man came to poke and prod. Or they told the witch doctor all they could remember to be absolved of the trauma of their births. To talk about how they came to be born in the first place, was taboo. The scientists entered, scribbled on yellow pads, scratching their heads in disbelief, told the world tales of the exotic customs of a strange and magical people.

with a nod to anthropologist, Horace Miner, who wrote of the Nacirema

[American backwards]

Joanna White, a music professor, returned to an early love of creative writing after performing on a concert with a poet, and is particularly grateful for the medical humanities dialog. She studies with Robert Fanning, Darrin Doyle, and Jeffrey Bean, and has works appearing or forthcoming in *The Examined Life Journal*, *Ars Medica*, *Pulse*, *Cape Rock*, *The MacGuffin*, *Sow's Ear Poetry Review*, *Milo Review*, *Poetalk*, *Hummingbird*, *Temenos*, *KYSO Flash*, *Chest Journal*, *Medical Literary Messenger*, *Minerva Rising*, and *Naugatuck River Review*, among others. She lives in Mt. Pleasant, Michigan with her husband and has a daughter and son in college.
