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Remains and Reversals

Rayna Green's satire *A Modest Proposal for the Museum of the Plains White Person* is effective at satirizing the methods used to display non-white cultures, and the parts of those cultures that are chosen to be displayed. This is done through the use of reversals and caricatures to mock the way non-white cultures are represented in media, and museums.

Green's use of stereotype reversal seen in the descriptions of white culture assists in showing that the ways other cultures are presented are absurd. White culture is portrayed as tribal or barbaric throughout this text, which is a direct reflection of how other cultures, specifically Native American culture, are portrayed in media, film, and displayed in museums. This reversal, seen in lines such as "We will reconstruct one of their temples" or "elaborate ceremonial and shamanistic costumes and instruments of power" displays white culture with the same reduction and stereotype as is typically applied to the Native American culture (Green). This is meant to allow those who see other cultures in the way used by media and museums to understand how absurd and over generalized these portrayals really are. Another example of reversal is the use of topics typically added in museums applied to the stereotypes of white culture that are being targeted by Green. Areas like food, customs, and famous persons, are used to display jokes used for white

culture in the same light as stereotypes of other cultures. This allows readers to see how these descriptions are putting those customs and people in a lower state as they are labeled as something to observe from 'above'. Therefore, these absurdities can be seen, the claims of these great people while also putting them into a lesser state such as this. By putting white culture and stereotypes into the same positions and descriptions as are used for other cultures disapprovingly in the eyes of Green, the text is able to effectively satirize the ways other cultures are represented in museums and show the absurdity of these generalizations.

Caricatures representing well-known stereotypes are used throughout the text to strengthen the reversal and absurdity of the descriptions of white culture. Many of the items and customs meant for display in the satirical museum mentioned in the text are well known jokes meant to mock white people, and these jokes are used as caricatures of white culture. One of these caricatures is the display of remains. The museum is attempting to display the remains of famous white persons, which it is said in the text that white culture "Reverence for the exhibition of the dead and goods from graves" While this does mention a caricature of white culture, it is also Green mocking the reverence for this practice, and therefore how the remains of Native American people are displayed, as it is not necessarily true that other cultures want to be represented and remembered using these methods (Green). Another typical stereotype used is food. The list of food items that are said to be crucial to white culture are meant to represent the joke of white people liking and utilizing very bland or boring food choices. This is one of the more blatant over generalizations and is used to satirize the simplistic assumptions made about other cultures. While it seems a

basic and small topic, it speaks to a larger issue that Green is demonstrating, being the generalization and reduction of cultures. It is the use of these caricatures that allows the reader to understand how incorrect and blatant these stereotypes of other cultures can be.

By reversing common white stereotypes and caricatures into the same positions and description styles as other cultures, Green is able to satirize these methods of displaying other cultures. She also makes it clear through this satire that the way white culture might want to be presented is not necessarily how other cultures do. It is through these blatant and disagreeable stereotypes that the absurdity of the representations of other cultures can be observed.

Works Cited:

Green, Rayna. "A Modest Proposal for the Museum of the Plains White Person."