

Race in their eyes were watching god novel

[Transportation](#), [Road](#)



The Road to Delusion

In the novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston, Mrs. Turner feels honored in Janie's presence due to Janie's "white folkish" appearance (Hurston 138). Through the extended metaphor of Mrs. Turner's racist ideology as a god, it is revealed that Mrs. Turner's racist paradigm functions as strongly as religion, and Hurston ultimately demonstrates that obsessing over superficial characteristics leads to complete delusion.

To demonstrate Mrs. Turner's loyalty to white features, Hurston writes that Mrs. Turner would not forsake her god even if he were to "hurl her from pinnacles and lose her in the desert" (Hurston 139). This alludes to a biblical story in which God condemns the Jews for being ungrateful, and curses them, forcing them to wander in the desert for 40 years before finding the promised land. Hurston not only draws parallels between Mrs. Turner's obsession with whiteness and false idol worship, but also levels her devotion with that of Christian worship: a universal symbol of passionate and consuming faith. This implies that Mrs. Turner's belief in racism, like a Christian's belief in God, consumes all aspect of her life. However, the reader can easily recognize that unlike the Jews who remained faithful for the promised land, there is no reward for Mrs. Turner's undying devotion to whiteness — nor will there ever be; she will not become more white. Thus, in contrast to Christians who maintain their faith because of a rewarding God, Mrs. Turner is seen as a fool who is wasting her life. This juxtaposition demonstrates that passionate worship in hopes of obtaining an impossible

goal, such as Mrs. Turner's quest for whiteness, merely turns people into delusional fools.

As a result of the African American population in the Everglades, Mrs. Turner finds it “distressing to emerge from her inner temple and find these black desecrators howling with laughter before the door” (Hurston 139). The word “temple” connotes a tranquil and holy environment, which indicates that Mrs. Turner feels that she is a superior being because of her beliefs. In contrast, the word “howling” suggests that Mrs. Turner sees black people in a savage and animalistic light, specifically because they do not share her aesthetic ideals. These connotations are reminiscent of the diction used to support acts such as the Spanish conquistadors: an educated group of people is obligated to attack or convert an inferior one on the basis of morality. Thus, Mrs. Turner feels obligated to impose her beliefs on to those that surround her because she genuinely believes that she is right and they need her help. However, in a historical context, such a mindset is known to be misguided and immoral. In this, Hurston demonstrates that not only is Mrs. Turner foolish, but only misguided and harmful, which proves the overall message that obsession over an unattainable and superficial feature leads to delusion.

In response to Mrs. Turner's beliefs, Tea Cake snaps that she “make[s] God look so foolish – findin' fault wid everything He made” (Hurston 139). Tea Cake's direct reference to the Christian God reveals that there is a disparity between Mrs. Turner's actions and God's will. Mrs. Turner worships white features to the point where it prevents her from properly paying homage to

God and she disrespects God's creation. To make a fool of God is seen as a fatal sin. And, because Mrs. Turner's god causes such sin, this gives the reader the sense that the two gods are rivals; they are God and Satan. Thus, Mrs. Turner is characterized as someone so caught up in her fantasy that she chases after the devil, trying to obtain more white features, all while she commits sin after sin. Hurston's greater message is exhibited, as Mrs. Turner's obsession with white features enchants her into defying God and morality. She can not think straight; she is oblivious to God; she is completely delusional.

Hurston's usage of an extended metaphor helps the reader understand Mrs. Turner's perspective on a deep level, but also delivers the message that an obsession over an unattainable and superficial goal leads to delusion. Mrs. Turner will never be white, nor is there anything she can do to become more white. However, she worships the idea with the same intensity that a Christian would worship their god in hopes of a miracle that will never come. This leads to the conclusion that Mrs. Turner has become delusional and the greater message that any similar obsession — be it darker hair, a thinner waist, or any other superficial feature — will propel a downward spiral into delusion.