



Colors Insulting to Nature

By Cintra Wilson
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Introduction

Liza Normal wants fame worse than air, food, sleep, or self-preservation. Her talents are slim, but she's been raised on a crash diet of Hollywood "I-can-do-it!" mythology, game-show anthems, and Love's Baby Soft-scented teen dreams. According to the delusional logic inherent in these value-starved sources, the key to Making It Big as a pop star is to simply want it badly enough and Believe in Yourself (and to follow the B-movie template for becoming one of life's golden winners). And so, innocent Liza's disco-ball fantasies are bowled down the yellow brick road, on a direct collision course with that whirling hall of hammers, Reality. She endures a wretched series of mishaps on the road to failure: disastrous love-affairs, scorching humiliations. But Liza, a far better human than the two-dimensional starlet she thinks she wants to be, is indestructible. When she finally surrenders to non-celebrity and embraces her marginal status, she is able to exact a ferocious and pure revenge on the formulaic clichés that screwed her up in the first place.

In *Colors Insulting To Nature*, Cintra Wilson has fused a hilarious yet strangely touching coming-of-age story, a picaresque romp, and a blistering satire of our celebrity-debased culture. Not since John Kennedy Toole's *Confederacy of Dunces*, Martin Amis's *Money* or, yes, Rabelais' *Gargantua and Pantagruel* has an antihero peeled away the lamination of our society with such savage glee and empathy.

Questions for Discussion

1. Why does Liza insist on believing that her big break is always just around the corner? What makes her so resilient?
2. During the novel, Liza is transformed from outcast high schooler to an icon for cultural depravity on the Vegas strip. Discuss how each of the men she encounters along the way -- Tonto, ChoCho, DeVonn, Greycoat, Bernardo, Butch Strange and Roland -- contribute to her metamorphosis. How else does Liza change throughout the course of this novel? Does she mature?
3. Liza turns a deaf ear to DeVonn when he calls after his spat with Cupcake. She also encourages Bernardo to sing at a party where he is ridiculed and subsequently falls off the wagon. Is Liza a sensitive person? Should she have been a better friend to DeVonn and Bernardo? Could she have helped them?
4. Ned Normal avoids the spotlight, yet he is reluctantly catapulted into the limelight. By contrast, Liza craves fame, yet struggles to achieve it. Does Ned deserve to be famous? Does Liza?
5. At Hadrian's party, Liza is thrown together with celebrity wannabees, druggies, and former child stars. She observes "though everyone was unreasonably good-looking and well-dressed, they seemed hollow and desperate." (p. 74) Does Liza envy or pity these people? Why doesn't her realization about their desperation make her abandon her quest for fame?
6. At one point, Peppy says to Liza and Ned, "Well, I did it. You kids are both successful artists." To what extent can Peppy take credit for her children's success? Do you sympathize with her?
7. Images of antlers and the golden stag appear throughout the novel, particularly in relation to Roland Spring. When Liza finally has Roland to herself, she realizes that he will never carry her away in "the cradle built for her between his splendid antlers." Why does Liza idolize Roland Spring? What does the golden stag represent? In general, what role does mythology play in this novel?
8. Why does Liza refuse to acknowledge the fact that she created Venal de Minus? Can you draw any parallels between Liza's journey to find her true destiny and Dorothy's journey to Oz?
9. Do you like it when the author speaks directly to the reader? How do these asides advance the plot and set the novel's tone? Are they effective?
10. What is the author saying about the role of fame in our culture? Is this a satire or coming-of-age novel or both? How would you describe this novel to a friend? What are some of your favorite moments?

About the Author

Cintra Wilson, playwright, essayist and former columnist for salon.com, and the *San Francisco Examiner*, dares to confront our national obsession with celebrity head on. Her voice is fresh, frank, funny, bold, brutal, vulgar and wild as she launches what one admirer refers to as a "literary air strike on our culture." A social commentator par excellence, Wilson has gathered rave reviews for her book of essays, *A Massive of Swelling: Celebrity Reexamined as a Grotesque Crippling Disease and Other Cultural Revelations*. She has collaborated with legendary director Francis Ford Coppola and had her work produced by Tim Robbins' Actor's Gang theater company in Los Angeles. Her character Winter Steele was a long-running segment of MTV's "Liquid Television" series. *Colors Insulting to Nature* is Wilson's debut novel. She lives in New York City.