The World will be Watching: The Panoptic Nature of Fame and Celebrity in Young Adult Fiction

“The World Will be Watching” explores the distinction between fame and celebrity by arguing that the public nature of celebrity makes it simultaneously a panoptic prison and an economic system in which a person can participate, rather than the means of leaving a legacy of fame. The paper considers the celebrity of reality television and juxtaposes the forced celebrity found within The Hunger Games by Suzanne Collins with the chased celebrity found in Lauren Conrad’s two trilogies, LA Candy and Fame Game. The essay addresses the panoptic nature of celebrity and questions whether choosing to be viewed is a way of commodifying oneself, imprisoning oneself, or possibly both. The paper explores the way celebrity creates docile bodies, as described by Michel Foucault, through fear (often of losing social status), as well as a desire to participate in the economic system of celebrity. Joshua Gamson argues people embrace celebrity culture and allow themselves to be viewed for both economic gain and cultural influence. This behavior is seen both in The Hunger Games and LA Candy. Although Katniss’s primary motive, initially, is not to make money—she simply wants to survive—she knows about, and frequently comments on, the incomparable wealth gained by the Games’ winning tribute. In contrast, Madison Parker, in Conrad’s novels, is in the game for the money. She makes it clear that she believes celebrity is the only path that will allow her to afford the life she desires. This essay explores the choices made by the characters in these novels and the results from that placement under the public gaze.

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