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BIOPOLITICAL SPECTACLE OF VIOLENCE IN *BILLY LYNN'S LONG HALFTIME WALK*

Abstract

Ben Fountain's satirical war novel, *Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk* (2012), offers a sharp critique of American politics and culture by examining the intersection of violence, trauma, and spectacle during the War on Terror. Through the protagonist, Billy Lynn, and the members of his squad, who navigate a surreal celebration of their war-time heroism during a Thanksgiving Day halftime show, the novel contrasts the physical and psychological realities of war with the superficiality of consumerist patriotism. Drawing on Foucault's concepts of biopower and biopolitics, as well as Mbembe's necropolitics and Agamben's ideas on the living dead, this paper provides a biopolitical reading and analysis of *Halftime Walk*. It examines how the soldier's body functions as a biopolitical instrument, extending beyond the military as a standard institution of disciplinary control. It reveals the subtle, pervasive, yet systemic ways biopolitical violence operates. Additionally, the analysis uncovers the tactics and mechanisms of American necropolitics that control soldiers' lives and deaths for political and financial gain and public reassurance, illustrating how soldiers are like the living dead, valued only for their symbolic role. With their war trauma erased from the halftime spectacle, the event becomes a grotesque display of entertainment and false patriotism. Billy must return to Iraq to complete his tour, and despite his biopolitical awakening, he realizes he has no control over his body, whether alive or dead.

Keywords: *Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk*, biopolitics, necropolitics, violence, trauma, spectacle

1. Introduction

Ben Fountain's *Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk*, a satirical novel published in 2012, was a finalist for the National Book Award and won the National Book Critics Circle Award for Fiction. The public reception was extremely favorable, with many considering it one of the finest contemporary war novels (as noted in *The New York Times*¹ and the *Washington Post*² reviews), which led Ang Lee to adapt the novel into a major film in 2016. Unlike other books from the Iraq War era that aimed to depict the realities and complexities of that conflict, such as *Generation Kill* (2004), *One Bullet Away* (2005), *Love My Rifle More Than You* (2005), and *My War: Killing Time in Iraq* (2005)—which offer personal accounts of the war—or *Fobbit* (2012), *Yellow Birds* (2012), and *Redeployment* (2014)—which present fictional narratives of deployed soldiers, Fountain's novel is primarily set in the United States during one of the most important American festivities, specifically the Thanksgiving Day game and halftime show. It follows the media-nicknamed Bravo Squad during an unlikely series of events. Their combat with insurgents in the Al-Ansakar Canal was captured on Fox footage and quickly went viral. To celebrate their valor, the American military decides to send the Bravos back home for the Victory Tour—a two-week expedition of the U.S. during which they are interviewed, honored, and enthusiastically thanked for their service. The climax of their victory tour occurs during the halftime show of the Cowboys vs. Bears game at the Dallas stadium, when they are ushered on stage alongside a Destiny's Child performance. The surrealism, spectacle, and superficiality of their Victory Tour are observed through the eyes of nineteen-year-old Billy Lynn, who has yet to process the experience of close combat and the loss of his comrade, who died in his arms.

In his talk "Soldiers on the Fault Line: War, Rhetoric, and Reality," delivered at a *War, Literature & the Arts* conference in 2013, the author of the novel commented that the "general insanity of American life in the early years of the twenty-first century" with its "avalanche of electronica, entertainment, and media needs a name" and he suggested to "call it the Fantasy Industrial Complex" (Fountain 311, 314). Fountain's lecture tracks the evolution of the Fantasy

¹ In the book review titled "America's Team," the author calls *Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk* "an inspired, blistering novel" (Dyer).

² In the book review, the author compares the novel to *Catch-22* which "is about to be updated for a new era" because it marks the transition "from bureaucracy to publicity, reflecting corresponding shifts in [American] culture" (Turrentine).

Industrial Complex, pinpointing it to the 9/11 attacks when “the difficult and complicated reality behind those attacks was quickly reduced to a simple-minded, easily digestible narrative of us versus them, good versus evil, Christians versus infidels” (316), all of which morphed into buzz words such as “War on Terror,” “Mission Accomplished,” and “support the troops” whose sole purpose, in his opinion, was to disguise the true agenda and to sedate the American public.

Since its publication, scholars have analyzed the novel in a similar fashion. They traced the history of the connection between the NFL and the military (Gudmestad 2015), explored the soldier-celebrity phenomenon (Williams 2017) and commodified hero image (Timss 2020), discussed the incongruity between the Iraq War media spectacle and soldiers’ memories (Rankin 2020), illustrated the crisis of truth (Kaiserman 2021), and the period of post-heroism (Alosman and Sabtan 2022).³ This paper, however, offers a biopolitical reading and analysis of *Halftime Walk*, focusing on the soldier’s body as a political instrument and tackling biopolitical violence, necropolitics, the idea of the living dead, and the cultural form of biopolitics that culminates during the halftime show. The paper suggests that, although Billy reaches biopolitical awakening, he remains trapped in the system and must return to Iraq to finish his tour of duty.

2. Forms of Biopolitical Power and the War on Terror

Michel Foucault coined the term *biopower* in the late 1970s and defined it as “the set of mechanisms through which the basic biological features of the human species became the object of a political strategy, of a general strategy of power” (*Security* 16). It was his contention that in ancient societies, the sovereign’s power to take life was replaced by “a right to make live and to let die” (*Society* 241) in

³ See: Gudmestad, Robert. “Patriot Games: Military Displays at Professional Football Games.” *Sport in American History*, 2 February 2015, <https://ussporthistory.com/2015/02/02/patriot-games-military-displays-at-professional-football-games/>; Williams, Brian. “The Soldier-Celebrity in *Billy Lynn’s Long Halftime Walk*.” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, vol. 58, no. 4, 2017, pp. 524–547; Timss, Braden. “The Hero Industry: Spectacular Pacification in the Era of Media Interactivity.” *Oc-cam’s Razor*, vol. 10, no. 5, 2020, pp. 1–14; Rankin, Cortland. “Their War, Our War: Private Memory and Public Commemoration in *Billy Lynn’s Long Halftime Walk*.” *Hollywood Remembrance and American War*, Routledge 2020, pp. 39–67; Kaiserman, Adam. “Unreality in America: Reading *Billy Lynn’s Long Halftime Walk* in a Post-truth Age.” *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, vol. 62, no. 5, 2021, pp. 574–585; Alosman, M. I. M., Sabtan, Yasser. “Negotiating Heroism in Ben Fountain’s *Billy Lynn’s Long Halftime Walk*.” *International Journal of Social Inquiry*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2022, pp.251–261.

modern societies (from the eighteenth century onwards). This shift from what Foucault calls “disciplinary technology,” which focused on disciplining the individual body, transformed into “non-disciplinary power” that attempts to regulate the processes affecting all human life, including “birth, death, production, illness, and so on” (*Society* 242–243). Foucault explains that this new power still employs discipline, but in a modified way, using different instruments. In his words, after the “anatomy-politics of the human body” that treated the individual body as a machine to be trained, optimized, and made useful, “biopolitics of the human race” aims to control health, economic status, and environment of the population (*Society* 243–245). The key focus of biopolitics is to determine who is worthy of protection and considered fully human. Biopolitics aims to govern⁴ populations not just through laws and regulations, but also through the institutions, media, and advertising by defining who and what is normal and desirable, and who and what is not, or, in Foucault’s words, “what must live and what must die” (*Society* 254), thus creating a sort of biopolitical racism.

Next to governmentality, security is another form of biopolitical practice that does not let anything happen at random or arbitrarily, but it allows things to happen exactly at the level where certain things can regulate themselves naturally. In other words, security works by “allowing circulations to take place, controlling them, sifting the good and the bad, ensuring things are always in movement, constantly moving around, continually going from one point to the other, but in such a way that the inherent dangers of this circulation are canceled out” (*Security* 93). Additionally, biopolitics utilizes surveillance to regulate the population and attempts to optimize productivity (for example, through health care and demographics), while also making individuals more docile (for example, through training and education). Although biopolitics centers on (the improvement of) the life of the entire population, the techniques and mechanisms it uses are not purely benevolent. By defining what is normal and acceptable, prescribing regulations, and employing surveillance for the sense of security, biopolitics creates its own exclusions.

Achille Mbembe, in his essay “Necropolitics” (2002), builds on Foucauldian ideas of biopower and biopolitics. Namely, he argues that many contemporary

⁴ Foucault thus defines governmentality as: “the ensemble formed by institutions, procedures analyses and reflections, calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of a very specific, albeit very complex, power that has the population as its target, political economy as its major form of knowledge, and dispositives of security as its technical instrument. (Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 108–109).

instances, such as war, occupation, and refugee camps, rely on the earlier forms of terror, such as colonialism, slavery, and death camps. He defines necropolitics as “contemporary forms of subjugation of life to the power of death” in which weapons are used to create *death-worlds* inhabited with the *living dead* (“Necropolitics” 39–49). Mbembe concludes that necropolitics focuses on the power to expose people to death (through oppression, violence, or abandonment and neglect) without any legal consequences.

Finally, Giorgio Agamben’s studies *Homo Sacer* (1995) and *The State of Exception* (2005) also build on Foucault’s idea insofar as he questions what happens to the individual or the population in extreme cases. To Agamben, the state of exception “tends increasingly to appear as the dominant paradigm in contemporary politics” (*State 2*), which simultaneously “binds and . . . abandons the living being to law” (1). By that, he theorizes bare life as one that is included in political life through its exclusion, and reduced to mere biological existence, that can be killed without legal repercussions, but not ritually sacrificed (*Homo* 12–13).

The U.S.-led War on Terror after 9/11 serves as a prime example of global biopolitical and necropolitical governance. It shows how the effort to control life and death expanded to international borders under the guise of defending the American way of life and American lives, both domestically and abroad. Domestic biopolitics included NSA surveillance, Transportation Security Administration screenings, and no-fly lists. A particularly aggressive measure was the Patriot Act, enacted to safeguard national security and fight terrorism. The War on Terror and the Patriot Act employed racial logic that linked Arab/Muslim populations to terrorists, which enabled dehumanization, surveillance, and killings without proper due process.

Afghanistan and Iraq became zones of necropolitical control where the U.S. military created “kill lists,” employed drone killing and targeted elimination, and, by doing so, decided which lives were disposable. In the article “The Everywhere War,” Derek Gregory examines the changes in the American way of waging war, stating that “[a]fter 9/11 President George W. Bush signed an authorization that gave the CIA wide latitude on the ‘war on terror’ through the issue of kill, capture, or detain orders against members of al Qaeda. . . . This was subsequently supplemented by a program directed at killing named individuals – High Value Targets” (240). Drone killings proved problematic as well since “the covert nature of a war conducted by a clandestine agency ensures that most

of its victims are wrapped in blankets of secrecy. . . There is little or no recognition of civilian casualties” (Gregory 241), and they are usually referred to only as collateral damage. Finally, Guantanamo Bay prison might be qualified as a *state of exception* where detainees are “neither prisoners nor persons accused” (Agamben, *State of Exception* 3–4) but objects reduced to bare life. In short, as Johnson argues in his article “The Biopolitics of Liberal War,” “international order of the 21st century has been defined by a ‘war on terror’ in which liberal states have engaged in practices of torture, rendition, targeted killing, mass surveillance, militarized border security and armed conflict” (88).

3. Billy Lynn and the Biopolitical Spectacle

It is well-known that twenty-first-century warfare is more removed, sanitized, light in casualties, and fought under the biopolitical mantra of preserving (the American way of) life, at the same time allowing other (invaded) states to accept democracy and achieve their full potential. Also, the military system everywhere heavily operates on biopolitical elements: the military orders, drills, training, and commands all serve to govern the lives and bodies of soldiers. This aligns with Foucault’s “anatomy-politics of the human body” that treated “the body as a machine: its disciplining, the optimization of its capabilities, the extortion of its forces, the parallel increase of its usefulness and its docility, its integration into systems of efficient and economic controls, all this was ensured by the procedures of power that characterized the *disciplines*” (*Sexuality* 139). Furthermore, the military determines who qualifies for the job based on age, mental and physical fitness, and who is deployed to war and how many times. Soldiers are constantly monitored, having to report to duty and disclose their whereabouts. For most of their careers, they live on bases, which are protected areas, all of which represents the other side of biopolitics, which Foucault called “regulatory controls: a biopolitics of the population” (*Sexuality* 139).

The Bravos in the novel *Billy Lynn’s Long Halftime Walk* are clearly immersed in the anatomy-politics of the human body, for the mere fact that they are American soldiers who have finished their training and are deployed to Iraq in 2004. However, this paper aims to reveal the strategies and techniques of biopolitics, necropolitics, and the state of exception in the novel *Billy Lynn’s Long Halftime Walk* that control soldiers’ lives and deaths for political and financial gain, public reassurance, and the sake of the spectacle that commodifies their trauma and sacrifice into a spectacular and violent form of false patriotism.

3.1. *Body as a Biopolitical Instrument*

First, the paper will address the soldier's body and the biopolitical instrument. Since the moment they enlisted, the soldiers' bodies have been managed (through military training, drills, commands, and deployment). However, this continues even more so once they are transported back to the United States (together with the dead body of their dead comrade) for their Victory Tour. During two weeks, their bodies are displayed, paraded, choreographed, and celebrated as symbols of national pride, might, and sacrifice. However, the state and the media use their bodies not for care, but for entertainment and propaganda. Once they served that purpose, they redeploy them back to Iraq, revealing the hypocrisy of American politics and military, which (ab)use their bodies to celebrate life—make live—and then send them back to war and possible death:

Now, here at the tour's end, feeling soft, sated, bleary, under-rested and overproduced, Billy grows sad and nostalgic for the beginning. They were hustled onto a C-130 in the middle of the night and took off from Baghdad in a hard spiraling scrooge. Shroom was with them, in a flag-draped coffin at the back . . . Being a Bravo means inhabiting a state of semi-celebrity that occasionally flattens you with praise and adulation. At staged rallies, or appearances at malls, or whenever TV or radio is present, you are apt at some point to be lovingly mobbed by everyday Americans eager to show their gratitude. (Fountain, *Halftime Walk* 4, 28)

The author's choice of verbs (“hustled,” “flattened,” “mobbed”) illustrates the abusive nature of their treatment and the subjective feeling of what was done to Bravos for the sake of praise, gratitude, and spectacle. Furthermore, Billy and some of his comrades were offered to meet the Cowboy players during which time they witnessed that the football players are physically bigger, stronger, and fitter, that they earn much more money than the soldiers, and have an infinite amount of football equipment available at their disposal: “They are among the best-cared-for creatures in the history of the planet, beneficiaries of the best nutrition, latest technology, the finest medical care, they live at the very pinnacle of American innovation and abundance” (Fountain, *Halftime Walk* 184). Throughout the novel, Billy asks for some painkillers to soothe the headache that has been draining him all day, only to be repeatedly denied relief. This supports the idea that the state instrumentalized their bodies not for care but for spectacle and propaganda.

Another, more peculiar, example of the (ab)use of a soldier's body happens when Billy meets a cheerleader, Faizon, and they have a brief sexual encounter in one of the corridors of the stadium. Both of them fully dressed, she practically forces herself onto his aroused body and reaches a climax in a matter of seconds, only to admit: "I've never made it this fast with anybody, . . . It's you, something about you. Maybe it's the war" (Fountain, *Halftime Walk* 154). Billy, who was still a virgin at that point, is shocked, but flattered, and starts to hope that they will deepen their relationship once he returns from Iraq. However, this episode vividly illustrates how irrelevant the Bravos are to the general American public. They have been physically abused for the pleasure of others, without receiving anything in return. Throughout their victory tour, the Bravos are driven around, placed in front of cameras to answer questions, pose for pictures, shake hands, and make their bodies available to the audience: "Then someone asks are we winning and that opens the floor for discussion about war, and Billy gets passed around like everybody's favorite bong" (Fountain, *Halftime Walk* 202).

3.2. Necropolitics: Who Dies and Who Profits

Not only were the Bravos' bodies controlled and orchestrated, but also their combat experience and trauma. Billy was often asked what he was thinking during the battle in the Al-Ansakar canal, but he never managed to put the experience into words. However, he thinks about it and reveals the knowledge and the trauma to the reader:

Every hour. No, every couple of minutes. About once every ten seconds, actually. No, it's more like an imprint on his retina that's always there, Shroom alive and alert, the dead, alive, dead, alive, dead, his face eternally flipping back and forth. He saw the beebz dragging Shroom into the high grass and thought Oh fuck or maybe just Fuck, that was the extent of Billy's reflections as he scrambled off his belly and made his run. Weirdest thing, though, he retains this sense as he got to his feet of knowing exactly how it was going to turn out, the visualization so intense that it shook loose a kind of double-consciousness that lingers to this day. (Fountain, *Halftime Walk* 42-3)

After the Fox footage of their fight had been released and went viral across the United States, the majority of the population claimed that they "have *never*, been prouder, to be American" (*Halftime Walk* 129). This suggests that Bravos' duty, fear, and trauma were commodified for the public to satisfy their curiosity

about “what it felt like” to be in war, to shoot at another human being, or to have a comrade die in your arms (Fountain, *Halftime Walk* 40). Their combat experience was used to motivate the football players before the game, inviting them to be “as brave and determined [as the Bravos] . . . and kick some Bear butt!” (*Halftime Walk* 185), supporting the idea that their true trauma is rendered invisible. Shroom’s death is barely relevant and mourned only in abstract terms and not as a human tragedy. During their victory tour, the public, the media, and the government celebrate their valor and heroism to the point that it loses all meaning and only further exhausts the Bravos. They are made available to the public eye, and at the same time, they only get “two nights and a day” (*Halftime Walk* 74) to see their families.

Furthermore, Bravos come from poor or working-class backgrounds and have real financial struggles. For instance, Billy’s family faces enormous financial trouble due to his father’s stroke, and they are in danger of losing their home. Billy joined the army at the age of eighteen to support the family financially and, like other Bravos, is excited about the prospect of selling their “story” to a movie producer and an investor for one hundred thousand dollars. Fountain presents war here as a profitable venture for elites who capitalize on the sacrifice, trauma, and death of working-class, racialized, and poor Americans. The movie producer and the owner of the Cowboys wish to rewrite their sacrifice and trauma into a pro-war narrative for personal profit and entertainment. In the end, the project fell through when the owner of the Dallas Cowboys refused to invest and dismissed the Bravos because, after two weeks, “[p]eople move on, they start to focus on other things (Fountain, *Halftime Walk* 271).

For two weeks, the Bravos are celebrated as heroes of the greatest nation on earth, on the one hand, while on the other, they are denied the privileges of that same nation they embody and defend. After the game, “no one stops to thank the Bravos for their service, to harry them for autographs or cell phone snaps. Cowboys nation is in full retreat; cold, wet, tired, whipped, they are bent on getting home as soon as possible, the hell with geostrategy and defending freedoms” (Fountain, *Halftime Walk* 298). Finally, after the victory tour concludes, the Bravos are sent back to Iraq for another eight months to complete their tour of duty. They are reduced to bare life, humans whose lives can be sacrificed without any ethical or legal consequences.

3.3. *Halftime Show as Biopolitical Spectacle*

The focal point of the novel is the halftime show, where biopolitics takes on a cultural form by displaying how the war is fought abroad but produced at home. It is noteworthy to mention that Fountain was inspired to write the novel when he was stunned watching the 2004 Thanksgiving halftime show⁵: “‘It was just such an insane mash-up of the very worst of American culture,’ he says. ‘It was like militarism and triumphalism mixed in with the fluffiest kind of pop culture and soft porn. I’m just sitting there thinking, I can’t believe what I’m seeing. The really amazing thing was: it’s normal’” (qtd. in Crain). Haunted by those images, the author struggled with the proper way to tell such a story from the perspective of the soldiers parading in the middle of the stadium during the halftime spectacle. However, he managed to immediately capture the trivialization of human sacrifice, values, and trauma he witnessed during the actual show:

. . . the man embarked on a rambling speech about war and God and country as Billy let go the words whirl and tumble around his brain

terrRist

freedom

evil

nina leven

nina leven

nina leven

troops

currj

support

sacrifice

Bush

Values

God

(Fountain, *Halftime Walk* 1-2)

The quote illustrates how, three years later, the national trauma of 9/11 was and still is condensed into slogans devoid of any substance and meaning. Likewise, the halftime show becomes a grotesque exhibition of a war aestheticized and disconnected from violence and trauma for the sake of entertainment and

130 ⁵ The whole show available here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-rX_VmukREU

celebration of patriotism. The Bravos are orchestrated around the stage, blinded by stage lights, deafened by fireworks, and hypnotized by half-naked, oversexualized Destiny's Child. They are present on the stage as part of the choreography, with their bodies visible and their lived experiences erased since their trauma is irrelevant for the halftime spectacle. The rituals of supporting the troops—yellow ribbons, Hollywood movies, and media presence—serve only to sustain national identity and the belief that America is fighting the good war with its heroes in bronze. However, for the Bravos, the halftime spectacle triggers their PTSD when the “electro-visual spaz-pulse and epileptic overload” together with “an unholy barrage of noise” overwhelms them as they helplessly partake in the production. They can only “stand at attention and get pole-danced in front of forty million people” (Fountain, *Halftime Walk* 230-39). One of the Bravos starts crying uncontrollably, and Billy is worried they might lose their minds before the show ends.

In his study *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (2009) Mark Fisher states that “[c]apitalism is what is left when beliefs have collapsed at the level of ritual or symbolic elaboration, and all that is left is the consumer-spectator, trudging through the ruins and relics. Yet this turn from belief to aesthetics, from engagement to spectatorship, is held to be one of the virtues of capitalist realism” (4–5). The novel, and especially the halftime show, offers a fine glimpse into capitalist realism, where sports, nation, Thanksgiving, war, and trauma have been sublimated into shallow platitudes and a spectacular audio-visual spectacle that mesmerize the population and devour any true value and thought. The Thanksgiving Day spectacle commodified soldiers and their trauma so that they became products to support the dominant ideology. The same attempt occurred with the movie deal, a promised Hollywood blockbuster as a “tale of heroism ennobled by tragedy” that would not just annul the “moral ambiguity” of the war in Iraq and make Americans “feel hopeful about [their] lives” (Fountain, *Halftime Walk* 6-7). Hence, the movie deal also moves toward a spectacle that “presents itself simultaneously as society itself, as a part of society, and as a *means of unification*” (Debord 2). The fact that the producers wish to set the story “to WWII” (Fountain, *Halftime Walk* 59) supports the argument that the war in Iraq, unlike the Second World War, is not just, necessary, and worth fighting, and that Bravos’ story should help to redeem it. As Debord contends, “[t]he spectacle that falsifies reality is nevertheless the real product of that reality, while the lived reality . . . ends up absorbing it and aligning itself with it” (3).

Throughout the novel, Billy realizes and comments that they are “the property,” the *poroduck*” (Fountain, *Halftime Walk* 34), “a prop” (140) in somebody else’s choreography since the “spectacle is able to subject human beings to itself because the economy had already totally subjugated them” (Debord 5).

During the last two days of their Victory tour, Billy becomes increasingly aware of the fact that they and their trauma have been hijacked, repurposed, and exploited. Nonetheless, he still believes that his knowledge and experience are “real,” whereas the entire victory tour, movie deal, and spectacle are fake: “this huge floating hologram of context and cue that leads everyone around by the nose, Bravo included, but Bravo can laugh and feel somewhat superior because they know they’re being used” (*Halftime Walk* 28). Their media-imposed fame turns into the pride of the nation that quickly deflates after two weeks of the Victory Tour, and, after the halftime show, the Bravos are abandoned: “They have been through the wringer of a world-class spectacle and need some time for their nerves to recover. Like, six years might do it? . . . ‘You guys have to leave,’ the roadie foreman barks at Bravo” (Fountain, *Halftime Walk* 241). What is more, the men who organized the halftime show (roadies) physically attack the Bravos in front of the stadium, which further underlines the shallowness of the spectacle they have just participated in—they served their purpose, played their role in the spectacle, and then are being assaulted and sent back to war. At that point, Billy realizes:

For the past two weeks he’s been feeling superior and smart because of all the things he knows from the war, but forget it, these saps, these innocents, their homeland dream is the dominant force. His reality is their reality’s bitch; what they don’t know is more powerful than all the things he knows. (*Halftime Walk* 306)

The Bravos experienced a whole variety of physical and psychological violence that, like their war trauma, remained invisible to the viewers of the halftime show. By saying that he would much rather be in Iraq than home, underlines the magnitude of violent explanation of their bodies and trauma for the sake of entertainment, profit, and patriotism.

Conclusion

In *Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk*, Ben Fountain remakes the spectacle of the 2004 Dallas Cowboys halftime show into a powerful critique of the ways contemporary American culture consumes war, trauma, soldiers, and patriotism. Drawing inspiration from an actual event, the author creates a narrative in which the members of the Bravo Squad become symbols and commodities, publicly hailed and celebrated, yet denied any true and honest recognition of their humanity and sacrifice. While previous analyses of the novel have focused on the celebrity status of the soldier, the mechanisms of the hero industry, commodification of war and soldiers, and the critique of superficial patriotism, this paper aims to position the novel within a biopolitical and necropolitical framework.

By engaging with Michel Foucault's notion of biopolitics, Achille Mbembe's concept of necropolitics, and Giorgio Agamben's insights on the "living dead," this analysis has highlighted how the Bravos' bodies are regulated, displayed, and ultimately sacrificed within the intertwined spheres of politics, entertainment, and profit. The halftime show functions not merely as a commemorative spectacle but as a biopolitical theater in which the soldiers' physical presence is instrumentalized for national affect and profit. Their exhaustion, trauma, and vulnerability are rendered invisible under the fabricated narrative of service, heroism, and sacrifice that the event seeks to display. In this sense, the Bravos are simultaneously hyper-visible, projected on screens for millions of Americans as icons of American valor, and profoundly invisible as human beings whose bodily, psychological, and emotional integrity is repeatedly compromised, neglected, or dismissed.

Moreover, the novel exposes how necropolitical logics extend beyond combat and into the domestic sphere. Once the Bravos have fulfilled their symbolic purpose during the Victory tour, the men are promptly returned to war, where their expendability becomes undeniable. Their brief glorification on American soil only underscores the unsettling truth that, even "in the land of the free," they possess little agency over their bodies or their destinies. They are celebrated not as living subjects but as already-sacrificed figures whose deaths can be anticipated, narrated, or otherwise consumed.

Ultimately, the biopolitical reading of *Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk* reveals that Fountain's critique reaches far beyond the patriotic spectacle. It exposes the

pervasive and systemic forces that subjugate human beings into instruments of national storytelling, emotional support, and profit, and it highlights the profound human cost of a culture that prefers symbols of heroism and sacrifice over the realities of the people who embody them.

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BIOPOLITIČKI SPEKTAKL NASILJA U ROMANU *BILLY LYNN'S LONG HALFTIME WALK*

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Satirični ratni roman Bena Fountaina *Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk* (2012.) oštro kritizira američku politiku i kulturu propitujući nasilje, traumu i spektakl tijekom Rata protiv terorizma. Protagonist Billy Lynn i članovi njegova voda postaju taoci nadrealne proslave svojega junaštva u Iraku. Tijekom poluvremena utakmice američkoga nogometa na Dan zahvalnosti, roman suprotstavlja fizičke i psihološke stvarnosti rata (utjelovljene u vojnicima) i površnost potrošačkog patriotizma (vlasnici kluba i prisutna publika). Oslanjajući se na Foucaultove koncepte biomoći i biopolitike, kao i na Mbembeovu nekropolitiku i Agambenove ideje o živim mrtvacima, ovaj rad donosi biopolitičko čitanje i analizu romana *Halftime Walk*. Analizira se način na koji tijelo vojnika funkcionira kao biopolitički instrument, nadilazeći vojsku kao standardnu instituciju disciplinske kontrole. Rad otkriva suptilne, sveprisutne, ali sustavne načine djelovanja biopolitičkog nasilja. Nadalje, analiza razotkriva taktike i mehanizme američke nekropolitike koji upravljaju životima i smrtima vojnika radi političke i financijske koristi te umirivanja javnosti, prikazujući vojnike kao svojevrzne žive mrtvace, vrijedne jedino zbog svoje simboličke uloge. Budući da je njihova ratna trauma izbrisana iz spektakla poluvremena, događaj se pretvara u groteskan prikaz zabave i lažnog patriotizma. Billy se mora vratiti u Irak kako bi dovršio misiju, a unatoč vlastitom biopolitičkom buđenju, shvaća da nema kontrolu nad svojim tijelom – živim ili mrtvim.

Ključne riječi: *Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk*, biopolitika, nekropolitika, nasilje, trauma, spektakl