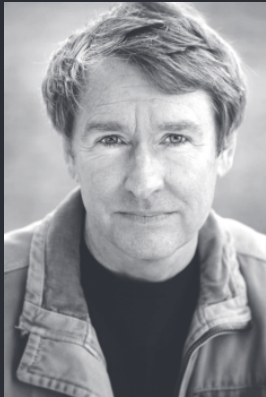


“THAT’S HOW WE LEARN”: BEN FOUNTAIN TALKS WITH STUDENT VETERANS AT EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

PHOTOGRAPH BY THORNE ANDERSON



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In his 2013 address to the US Air Force Academy, Ben Fountain, author of the Iraq War-centered novel *Billy Lynn’s Long Halftime Walk* (HarperCollins, 2012), likens American veterans who struggle to return home to the titular character of Homer’s *The Odyssey*.

Well, in essence, what’s the story of *The Odyssey*? It’s the story of soldiers trying to find their way home. They’ve been at war for ten years, and then they spend the next ten years trying to get home. . . . I read something a while back, a statistic to the effect that one out of every three homeless people in the United States is a veteran. Well, that’s the story of Odysseus and his companions, soldiers who are wandering, trying to get home. But these homeless people among us, these veterans, they’re the ones who didn’t make it all the way – they are, literally, homeless. So, the next time you’re in Denver or San Francisco or New York and you see a bunch of homeless folks hanging out on the sidewalk, think about Odysseus and his boys out there wandering.¹

¹ Ben Fountain, “Soldiers on the Fault Line: War, Rhetoric, and Reality,” *War, Literature, and the Arts* 25 (2013): 11–12. The full address, the Seventh Annual David L. Jannetta Distinguished Lecture in War, Literature & the Arts, is also included as a preface to the 2016 HarperCollins edition of *Billy Lynn’s Long Halftime Walk*. Quotations from the novel are cited from this edition.