

Through Bloodshed, Conflict, and Disaster, the People Seek Humanity

Abstract

Both historical and current is the topic of violence. Taking form as attack, murder, and war, conflict continues to terrorize those subject to it. In attempt to combat the everlasting effects of violence, people time again seek humanity. In this research piece, the essences of humanity are explored as compassion, empathy, familiarity, and normalcy. Across three culturally relevant works belonging to three different genres, the silhouette of the theme of people seeking humanity during violence is analyzed respectively, and finally synthesized.

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Professor Otte / Writing 1

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War is defined as the occurrence of conflict between various states or groups, which involves hostility, bloodshed, and sacrifice. It is paradoxical how an event that is often sparked by the desire to birth a new nation or government is almost purely in connection with death. The cost of violence bills not only those physically lost as a consequence, but also those alive to reap the aftermath: families, friends, lovers, and fellow citizens.

Expanding further than the borders of war, violence altogether is a prevalent motif throughout history, and in the present; few examples include mass shootings, police brutality, and political unrest. Therefore, I feel it important to assess the theme alive throughout multiple genres, which relays the message that during violence, people seek humanity.

To further define the term “humanity” related to my chosen theme, it is a quality associated with mercy, dignity, and empathy. Feeling, love, and compassion are all terms I associate with the embodiment of humanity—these are merely few of the essences sought by the people in my chosen genres. Overall, I chose to further analyze the theme of people seeking humanity during violence across genres not only to expand upon the terror it brings upon people, but also, to explore their connections and pleas for mercy as a result of it.

Across genres, this deep, yet necessary theme is explored in diverse manner: video games, literature and music are those which will be addressed in this project. The common phrase “history repeats itself” comes from the notice of, frequently disastrous moments in history, that we in the future pledge to refrain from mimicking. Yet, darkness still stalks across this midnight world; in violent times where humanity is jailed, it is then instead sought.

Genre #1 - Video Games

A Deeper Look at Naughty Dog's 2013 Hit Game "The Last of Us I"



A capture of Joel Miller and Ellie Williams laying-low in defense while being hunted by a rival military group. | ruslan66.

"Download Wallpapers by Subject Games." *GoodFon - Wallpaper on Pc and Phone*, 2020,

www.goodfon.com/games/wallpaper-badfon-the-last-of-us-dzhoel-elli-3742.html. Accessed 15 Dec. 2025.

This digital dystopia is a sharp-edged sword, cutting through the hearts of its audience. Originally developed in 2013, "The Last of Us" tells the story of two main characters, Joel Miller and Ellie Williams, who develop dependency on one another while trying to survive and cure a morbid plague. In exploring the formation of the two protagonists' close relationship during the spreading of a morbid disease, and a war waged upon citizens by a vicious government, a display of humanity is evident. The story mashes together ugliness and beauty. Ugliness through martial violence, sickness, and death, but beauty found in the humanity of human connection.

The medium of the genre being a video game contributes to the rise of psychological pressure in its players by prompting them to make decisions in real time. Though translated into a drama in 2023, I, and lead developer Neil Druckmann, recognize the video game medium to be of greater intimacy for audiences, as it invites them to feel the "thrill" and "excitement" (Druckmann 2025) that follows with making a choice.

Leaving morally blurred decisions in the hands of late stage teenagers, as intended by the developers, stimulates them to consider how their paths may change in a story with a simple click. Neil Druckmann and co-developer Bruce Straley of game development group “Naughty Dog” found inspiration for *The Last of Us* from their desire to contribute to a genre of horror that subtly relies on the responsibility of players and their skills of survival. Throughout this video game, players are given choices regarding murdering cross-path enemies, deciding whether or not a person is worthy of being healed to escape their fate, and upgrading weaponry. While the motif of choice is the emphasized quality of a video game as opposed to a different genre, this style of video game maps out a particular story, therefore making the player’s role in the plot somewhat limited. Gamers refrain from controlling Joel’s decisions, therefore making the genre limited. However, this is still psychologically challenging in testing as to whether or not players will come to terms with said decisions they may strongly oppose. Joel’s killing-and-fleeing rampages subvert the merciful essence humanity portrays. His selfish acts, take for example him killing a physician and thus diminishing the chance at finding a cure for the Cordyceps disease for the sake of keeping Ellie with him, illustrate that this genre recognizes that human behaviors do not always follow a moral compass in times of apocalyptic violence; however, they also serve as a testimony of the deep connection he formed with another through the wounds created by violence. In sum, though his immoral behavior supports the theme that humanity was strayed away from during violence, his hunger for human connection and familiarity through Ellie, a hunger for companionship, survival, and hope, also clearly displays the theme of humanity being sought during violence.

The deadly Cordyceps disease stands as the catalyst for the world’s apocalyptic state, which is based off of a beyond ancient breed of fungus from the sci-fi show “*Primeval*.” But, the

origins of the main story are a result of something much deeper: all to do with humanity in contrast to this strand of death. The lesser noticed purpose of this video game is to display humanity in the medium of a person. Joel Miller is practically a dead man walking (Druckmann 2013). It is not that Miller is physically ill, but rather, emotionally ill as a result of the death of his daughter Sarah; the grief he carries throughout in combination with his rage toward the soldier, who was ordered to murder Sarah for fear of her spreading disease, rots away his happiness and residence in the present. In the time where both a violent outbreak and government persevere, Ellie Williams “would pull these aspects [of humanity] back out of [Joel]” (Druckmann 2013).

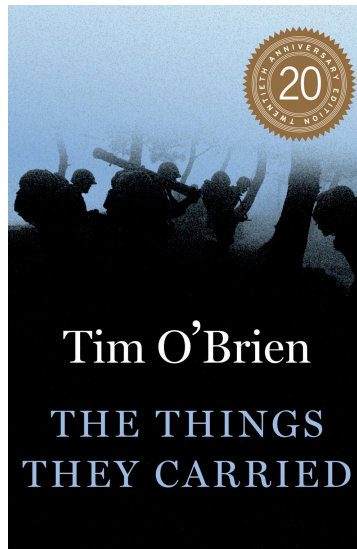
The overriding tone in *The Last of Us I* is bittersweet because we are met with two characters finding comfort, and furthermore protection in one another as they face an apocalyptic state. “Could you build an entire game around this concept of meeting a character [Joel] really early on and forming a bond that would evolve and shift as you see all the facets that a deep relationship between two people can have?” (Druckmann 2013) was a proposal question during early development which reflected upon the game’s tone through a dystopian setting, gameplay events, and the language used in dialogue. The slightly undersaturated graphics in the video game contribute to a gloomy tone; additionally, the presence of withered buildings, heavily guarded borders, frequent blood splatters, and remains of both buildings and people set the tone of a truly violent, disastrous world. Prevalent gameplay events include Joel warming up to Ellie’s presence, the pair escaping and killing infected members of the violent “Fireflies” rival group, and him sacrificing the well-being of the world to keep her alive. Together, the game’s setting and the developed father-daughter relationship between the two main protagonists paints a tone

containing a theme of humanity being sought through violence: the art of two people sticking together in an apocalypse.

Lastly, in expanding upon the language which contributes to the tone and above prevalent theme, we see the criteria for this theme satisfied; the pair have their fair share of arguments in distress; however, we see elements of humanity, such as comfort, security, and familiarity, blatantly stated as the spark of their relationship. “Everyone I have cared for has either died or left me. Everyone - fucking except for you! So don't tell me I would be safer with somebody else, because the truth is I would just be more scared.” (The Last of Us I) says a breaking Ellie to a once hardened Joel. Thus, a stance of humanity is thoroughly explored throughout the game, showing both its ugly side in the form of martial law and murder, and its beautiful side in the form of two characters finding one another.

Genre #2 - Fictional Literature

“The Things They Carried” are Reminiscent of Humanity



Book Cover of “The Things They Carried” Published in 1990 | National Endowment for the Arts. “The Things They Carried.”

Wwww.arts.gov, 1990, www.arts.gov/initiatives/nea-big-read/things-they-carried.

This fictional work set during the Vietnam War is a collection of stories pertaining to the deep experiences of drafted soldiers: “Not bloody stories, necessarily. Happy stories, too, and even a few peace stories” (O’Brien 38). On the battleground the men, namely Lieutenant Jimmy Cross, Ted Lavender, Rat Kiley, etc., would inevitably face, there lived spirits of their home lives, raw desires, and emotions. Humanity refers to not only compassion and love, but also the greater description of humanness, mortality even. It is human to feel and to dream; during war, these poor men sought relief from their emotions and fulfilment of both their dreams, and psychological need for comfort. Therefore, as author Tim O’Brien mentions that not all stories from the violent war were bloody ones, keep in mind that it is humanity that made that so.

Tim O’Brien writes “The Things They Carried” in a style that includes both first person and third person recollection. His authorship allows for the audience to understand events that

occurred, despite being limited to O'Brien's point of view. Additionally, he himself having served in the Vietnam War contributes a personal feel to the fictional stories documented in this book, which is further validated by his confession to NPR host Neal Conan in which the veteran states "[he carries] the memories of the ghosts of a place called Vietnam..." including "[the] weight of responsibility, and a sense of abiding guilt" (O'Brien 2010). The aspects of humanness evident throughout the book include friendship, inner guilt, and humorous conversations between trapped young men; all of which are parallel to his noted personal experiences in Vietnam.

War is no stranger to violence: the two are intertwined, "married" per say. Notable plot points and climatic events that occur throughout this work of fiction are the introduction to both the physical and psychological weights the soldiers carry with them, the acceptance and demeaning guilt that follows Lieutenant Jimmy Cross after the death of Ted Lavender, and the narrator coming to terms with his draft. The medium of these printed recollections being a book separated into chapters allows for intimacy between the author and the audience by allowing them to read the narrator's experiences, the twists and turns, his and his colleagues' agony, at their own pace, further allowing each detail to soak in. Overall, genre allows the audience to simultaneously understand the impacts of traumatic violence and the manner in which the characters seek humanity throughout.

O'Brien's tone throughout the piece formulates a somber setting. His choice of language, articulation, and orientation of these scarring memories work in coalition by humanizing the men being sacrificed to war, and conveying how they seek humanity throughout. One notable example being the initial introduction to Jimmy Cross: the young, lovesick lieutenant. In the first chapter of the book, O'Brien informs the audience that Cross carries with him letters and pictures of his one-sided lover, Martha. As the chapter continues, the young man struggles to accept the

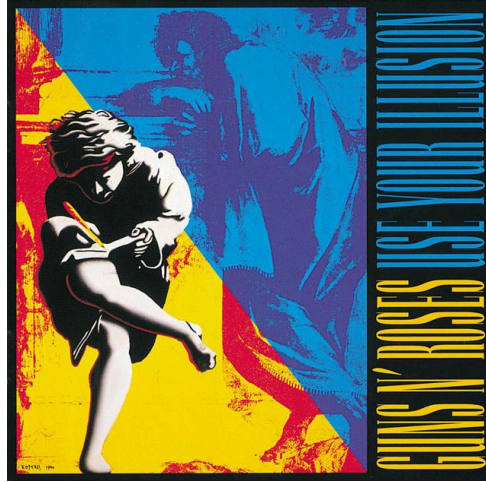
death of one of his army men, Ted Lavender, and therefore turns to his contemplating thoughts about Martha. By this first example, Cross sought comfort and emotional fulfillment in Martha, someone who was familiar to him, whom he loved and was comforted by; familiarity and a merciful escape to the ongoing death and violence are embodiments of humanity. Another outstanding instance in which the men are humanized, and seek humanity occurs in the middle chapter titled "The Man I Killed." Tim recalls, in detail, the death of a man from Vietnam: a death caused by himself. Confronted for his guilt by fellow armyman Kiowa, "[later,] he said, 'Tim, it's a war...It's a tough thing, for sure, but you got to cut out that staring.'" (O'Brien 111) However, this proves to be a daunting ask from O'Brien, as throughout the chapter, he empathizes with the man for fearing foreign army men facing him, he considers the family members the man would never see again, and he soaks in the reality of his actions; the poor soldier sought humanity through violence, his act of violence specifically, by finding and expressing compassion for the one who lay lifeless: the dead man had a life of his own, and Tim acknowledged that.

Finally, the author's purpose throughout this work of fiction is to display the rollercoaster that is war. Each of O'Brien's recollections communicate the various experiences that come before, during, and after violence, and, though we are limited to his point of view for each scenario, through thorough description, dialogue between characters, and inner monologue, a clear display of this purpose is birthed. Further, the stories and this purpose illustrate O'Brien's stance on war, which perpetuates that it is a traumatizing time of violence and mortality that through which, people find ways to cope; the essences of humanity, compassion, hunger for peace and love, are present. In the words of the veteran in the chapter "The Ghost Soldier," in which he recalls Rat Kiley aiding him during agony, "It's a hard thing to explain to somebody

who hasn't felt it, but the presence of death and danger has a way of bringing you fully awake. It makes things vivid. When you're afraid, really afraid, you see things you never saw before, you pay attention to the world. You make close friends. You become part of a tribe and you share the same blood—you give it together, you take it together” (O’Brien 166) Evidently, it is here where the theme of people (in this case army men) seeking humanity throughout violence is validated; through agony, death, and illness, it is human to find light through friendships and comradery.

Genre #3 - Music

Guns N' Roses' "Civil War" Calls for Humanity: Where is the "Civility" in War?



Guns N' Roses - "Civil War" Album Cover | "Spotify – Web Player." *Spotify*, 2025,
open.spotify.com/track/6PGg2sjapGhWCLof7wE5m5. Accessed 16 Dec. 2025.

In this piece of Saul "Slash" Hudson's and Axl Rose's rocky, metallic art lives a humanitarian message, more than merely a political one. Consider, little benefit from violence and war; it is the government's responsibility to ensure the protection of their citizens, not lead them to a bloody battleground. A sense of empathy and care are absent here on part of authority, a sense of humanity.

Song being the medium for the expression of said message allows for language and physical tone to be prioritized. Rose belts the lyrics in a particular manner. His voice is composed of a passionate, loud, rage-filled tone which empowers the language used, language that strives to lead authoritarian figures to "Look at [their] young men fighting," (Guns N' Roses 8) and realize that genocide "washes away [the people's] human rights" (Guns N' Roses 19-21), "[feeding] the rich, while [burying] the poor" (Guns N' Roses 32). In combination, the raw, emotional tone of the lead singer's voice and the song's pleading lyrics for realization toward the

abominations of war contribute to the articulation of the theme that through violent times, people seek humanity.

Songwriter Duff McKagan utilized personal experience when brainstorming the lyrics for “Civil War,” according to an interview conducted by radio program “Rockline.” He explains how “true life-experiences” (McKagan 1993), such as a peace march he attended as a young boy, acted as direct inspiration for the lyrics; in specific, he references a line in the song questioning shooting those who seek peace and protest war. This genre of song resembles a cry for humanity, the band’s goal is to ultimately reach the minds of listeners, and government figures in different manners. Compassion toward both people of opposing sides, and especially those the audience deem fellow citizens, in addition to humanitarian decency in the form of being against suffering and death are components of humanity’s presence throughout the song; during war, the singers seek for the authoritarian and ordinary audience to adopt such humanitarian recognition.

Furthermore, the stance against war is in support of the theme that during violence, people seek humanity. The prior mentioned literary elements, language, tone, medium, and genre, work collaboratively to structure the message that war and violence bring destruction upon people. There is a stern yearning for realization, as exemplified by the lyrics which read “Look at the shoes you're filling / Look at the blood we're spilling / Look at the world we're killing / The way we've always done before / Look in the doubt we've wallowed / Look at the leaders we've followed / Look at the lies we've swallowed” (Guns N’ Roses 38-44); not only is the band seeking personal awareness to call for humanity against the horrors of violence, but they are pleading for others to do the same. Additionally, the lyrics which cry that “[power-hungry authorities], [are] sellin' soldiers in a human grocery store” (Guns N’ Roses 34) further encourage the seeking of humanity in times of war, forcing the powerful to face the

reality that their soldiers, pawns in war, are human beings that deserve care. Altogether, the song reiterates an anti-war stance, and the belief toward the necessity of recognizing humanity during violence.

In analyzing the above elements, the purpose of the piece is a powerful one: to protest against war, and more so, solicit the world to combat such violence with humanity. Authoritative figures and their lack of mercy for the people they send to fight on behalf of their views subvert such a concept. The larger picture hopes to be examined, so that audiences realize the crushing of individuals with their own lives, loved ones, stories, and plans, expose the vilely of war. Truly, there is no civility in war; but there is in humanity.

A Synthesis

Through Bloodshed, Conflict, and Disaster, the People Seek Humanity Across Genres

A cliché exists across each of the three pieces: the agony caused by violence prompts people to seek humanity and all that it embodies: compassion, dignity, empathy, familiarity, love, and mercy. Each of these genres share the same theme. However, with the existence of such similarities, there also exists differences.

In beginning with addressing the differences across each genre, the depictions of violence and the manners in which each author or character seeks humanity vary. In “The Last of Us I,” violence takes on an apocalyptic form; the plague causing vicious illness and quick death upon many in coalition with the mobilization of the state’s military set the stage of a dystopia. Protagonists Joel Miller and Ellie Williams showcase their desperation for humanity in the form of human connection. Whereas, in Vietnam veteran Tim O’Brien’s book “The Things They Carried,” and in the Guns N’ Roses song “Civil War,” violence is depicted directly as the spirit of war. Though the book and song share the same depiction of violence, they differ in their exemplifications of humanity. Characters like Lieutenant Jimmy Cross and Tim himself in the wartime work of fiction seek humanity in the form of comfort, familiarity, and strong-loving emotion; they sought humanity in its compassionate and emotional essence, rather than in a way which outright demands mercy, like in “Civil War.” The pained and passionate tone of Guns N’ Roses singer Axl Rose and the lyrics he sings convey a plea for mercy from a worldwide audience: humanity is not only sought, but demanded for the greater good of the people. In approaching their depictions of violence differently, these genres prove that the theme, during violence, people seek humanity, is versatile in its nature; while there many scenarios in which violence exists, and different expressions of humanity, the general idea is the same: to soften or

stop the antagonism of disaster. Furthermore, the approach in which each genre takes to express the mutual themes vary in their mediums. When comparing a video game, a fictional book, and a song to one another, standard differences are obvious. In a video game, the player is able to visualize the scenes and make choices; though limited, the freedom still exists to an extent, and slightly alters players' experiences. Whereas, in a fictional book and in a song, the audience is fed a story or message; while phrases and lyrics are able to be interpreted differently by the audience, there is a standard as to how the beginning, middle, and ending of the pieces are. Also, unlike in a video game and a song, the audience is unable to hear verbal expression and tone outright; the video game features dialogue and the song relies on the voice of the singer to be delivered, while the book relies solely on the orientation of the author's language. Despite these differences, the motif, during violence, people seek humanity, made its presence clear.

Though of different ideas, mediums, and authors, each genre shares similarities that spark said connection between the piece and the theme. In general, each piece depicts a form of violence, and no matter what form it is depicted in, whether that be in the form of an apocalypse or a political war, the chaos stands. Without each genre illustrating disaster, and a measured degree to which people would call for comfort or action against it, the theme would fail to exist. The complete purpose of each piece is to tell a story consisting of said elements prior; altogether, "The Last of Us I," "The Things They Carried," and "Civil War," explore events with the purpose of not only notarizing the amount of bloodshed that comes with violence, but also acknowledging that people seek ways to cope with the aftermaths and heal them, through the essences of humanity. In addition to this, each of the mentioned genres are similar in language and tone. Altogether, each genre creates a solemn tone through language and notable events. The video game features a gloomy setting, emotion-packed dialogue, and morally ambiguous

decisions to keep alive a human connection, and both the book and song use diction to picture fields drenched in the blood of innocent individuals sacrificed by their governments.

Across each of these genres lies not only the cliché of agony caused by violence prompting people to seek humanity and all that it embodies, but a consensus. To some moral degree, we as humans understand violence as harmful. Although the term is most commonly associated with bloodshed, discourse, and murder, it also takes on the forms of societal oppression and illness, like in “The Last of Us I.” Despite the general human awareness of the abominations married to violence, such events still occur today in the form of disease like the recent Covid illness, war and genocide, like in the middle east region, Sudan, and Ukraine, and murder, like mass shootings. So, while it unfortunately seems inevitable to prevent these breaks of violence, there is a consensus that humanity is the light of hope in such times. Throughout each genre, each main character or author seeks one of the embodiments of humanity, compassion, dignity, empathy, familiarity, love, and mercy. In real life and in the present, we too seek these essences as well: take for example sharing stories online in hopes of finding someone who can relate, protesting against polarized politicians, and reminiscing on the presence of people, places, or things that bring us a feeling of security. It can be agreed upon that there is little acceptance for violence within our world, yet it seems to always spring back. But even so, humanity refuses to back down.

With this synthesis coming to end, lessons and conclusions can be made. What stood out most to me in analyzing my chosen theme across genres, though abstract, is that it is real and running. Disregarding the, generally, more extreme forms of violence like war, genocide, and plague, and focusing more on its infant forms like heated discourse, I understand that it will unfortunately always be present. Whether in the news, or in real life, unpleasantness and

inequities have and will continue to have their ways with the world. However, by humbling myself and reaching out for humanity, recognizing that we are all people living in the same world, will allow me to navigate it with greater strength and grace.

Then again, violence still stalks across this midnight world; in violent times where humanity is jailed, it is then instead sought according to multiple genres, and real world events.

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