Your third blog entry, which you will post on **www.NetflixStudies.com**, is due before **5:00 p.m. Friday, June 1 (note: this is a one-day extension of the deadline listed on your syllabus)**. Before posting your comments (which should be at least **600 words**), you should **[1]** watch the pilot episodes of the Netflix original series *Godless*, *Lost in Space*, and *Santa Clarita Diet*, and **[2]** read the following short online articles about those three programs:

- **Sophie Gilbert, "What *Godless* Says About America,** *The Atlantic* **(November 27, 2017):** **https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2017/11/godless-review-netflix/546719/**

- **Scott Tobias, "*Godless*: Why Netflix's Brutal, Timely Western Is a Must-See,"** *Rolling Stone* **(November 22, 2017): https://www.rollingstone.com/tv/features/godless-why-netflixs-brutal-timely-western-is-a-must-see-w512344**

- **Jeff Spry, "Why the Creators of Netflix's *Lost in Space* Changed the Iconic Robot So Drastically,"** *SyFy Wire* **(April 17, 2018): http://www.syfy.com/syfywire/why-the-creators-of-netflixs-lost-in-space-changed-the-iconic-robot-so-drastically**

- **Michael Rougeau, "Netflix's *Lost In Space* Season 1 Review: The Galaxy's Most Realistic Family,"** *Gamespot* **(April 16, 2018): https://www.gamespot.com/articles/netflixs-lost-in-space-season-1-review-the-galaxys/1100-6458233/**

- **Jacob Oller, "*Santa Clarita Diet* Owes Its Daring Horror-Comedy to Its Dreadfully Sunny Production Design,"** *Paste* **(March 28, 2018): https://www.pastemagazine.com/articles/2018/03/netflix-santa-clarita-diet-production-design-zombi.html**

The latest mini-lectures, available for listening and viewing on Canvas, have focused on particular TV genres, such as the police procedural and the courtroom drama. This week's blog posting assignment asks you to consider **the function of genre**, looking specifically at the cultural relevance of **westerns** (such as *Godless*), **science fiction** (such as *Lost in Space*), and **horror-comedy** mashups (such as *Santa Clarita Diet*). Before you begin, it is helpful to first consider **the concept of genre**.

The French word **genre**, which translates into English as "genus" (meaning family or type), refers to **any category of cultural production** that has been **formed over a period of time** and which is **characterized by sets of formal conventions**. In the field of TV studies, it is also a means through which audience members are able to recognize and mentally organize screen signifiers into a logical and meaningful whole. As such, it is both **a form of classification** (one that has been used in literary studies) and a process through which individual fictions can be grouped together according to their visible similarities, at the level of **iconography**, **plot**, **settings**, **themes**, and so forth. In terms of **iconography**, some genres (such as the Western) are relatively stable, featuring the same visual elements across multiple examples (films, television series, novels, etc.). Tellingly, the Netflix original series *Godless*, written and directed by Scott Frank, begins with a title sequence that clearly indicates its generic affiliation. Here are some of those opening credits images:

six-shooter   Native American   train/railroad

shotgun

cemetery

cowboy

"INNER FORMS"	"OUTER FORMS"
BINARISTIC STRUCTURES	ICONOGRAPHY
THE ORGANIZATION OF NARRATIVE AROUND ESTABLISHED PLOTS	THE SYMBOLIC USE OF PROPS, COSTUMES, SETTINGS, ETC.
SYMPTOMATIC AND IDEOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF THE GENRE (GENDER, RACE, SEXUALITY, ETC.)	SPECIFIC WAYS OF FRAMING/COMPOSING SHOTS OF HEROES, VILLAINS, LANDSCAPES

"SCIENCE FICTION"

space ships, rockets, flying cars, etc.
alien beings/extraterrestrials
computers, AI systems, etc.
robots, androids, cyber-organisms, etc.
genetic engineering, cloning, etc.
military hardware and weaponry
soaring skyscrapers, metallic surfaces, etc.

ICONOGRAPHY

Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927)

a futuristic city built upon worker exploitation, governmental corruption, and corporate greed

Most westerns are structured along **binaristic lines**, with contrasting ideas presented in dualistic fashion. Early theoretical treatments of the Western were influenced by Claude Levi-Strauss's structuralist methods of studying myths as sets of binary oppositions. Theorists of the Western became increasingly obsessed with reading the genre in terms of thematic binaries of the frontier mythology: The wilderness vs. civilization; Law vs. lawlessness; Lawmen vs. outlaws; The individual vs. the community; Nature vs. culture; The West vs. the East; The garden vs. the desert; Cattlemen vs. homesteaders; Cowboys vs. Indians; Schoolmarms vs. dancehall girls; etc.

Genre theorists approach the medium of television by examining HOW and WHY TV programs have been classified and organized in specific cultural and historical contexts. Of particular importance are the **codes** and **conventions** within and among those programs. Fans of certain kinds of television shows (e.g. fantasy programs, situation comedies, soap operas) form an "interpretative community," one that is bound together by a shared understanding of the **often-formulaic** ways that stories are "told" or communicated televisually.

Rather than simply reject storytelling formulas, however, you are encouraged to **adopt a critically objective perspective** and try to ascertain WHY it is that millions of viewers are drawn to particular types of series at particular moments; and HOW it is that **conventions in iconography, visual imagery, narrative patterns, and archetypal characters** continue to play an important role in both the industry and society as a whole.

With the above comments in mind, you are being asked to respond to some of the questions below.

In what ways do *Godless* and *Lost in Space* typify their respective genres (the Western and Science Fiction)? Does a full appreciation of these Netflix programs require an understanding of how those genres "work" (thematically, ideologically, etc.)? Are you a fan of either of these two genres, and if not did the first episodes of *Godless* and *Lost in Space* increase your interest in learning more about Westerns and/or science fiction? In what ways do these shows break from genre conventions, offering up fresh/new perspectives on such topics as community, family, femininity, masculinity, etc.? Between horror and comedy, which does *Santa Clarita Diet* lean toward in its first episode? Are those two genres, which are combined in that series, complementary or contradictory in any ways? What was the most humorous moment in the episode, and which scene or shot was the most horrifying?

THE WESTERN (in its "classical" form)

- the hero, a man alone, adopts a worldview that is both moral and decent

- the hero demonstrates skills with guns and horses

- the antagonist's goals are mercantilist/materialist (e.g. accumulation of money, land, cattle)

- the land is pastoral, representing freedom as well as primitivism

- civilization is represented by the forces that exert an organizing influence on life (e.g. the town, the army, married life, children)

- the struggle between the forces of primitivism and those of civilization forms the principle dilemma for the Western hero

- drama plays out in ritualized forms (e.g. gunfights, cattle drives) and individual conflicts are acted out (externalized) rather than negotiated or minimized (internalized)

SCIENCE FICTION (in its "classical" form)

- the central character is an innocent bystander who is victimized by a technological accident or unnatural phenomenon

- the central character might not overcome the challenge of the antagonist (he or she begins and ends the narrative as a victim), although the outcome for society is often more hopeful than that in a horror film

- the antagonist might be a scientist or the product of scientific experimentation

- the scale of the antagonist is often so great that the central character is reminded of his or her mortality and insignificance/smallness

- the principle environment can be urban or rural, earthbound or otherworldly; regardless, the environment is generally a benign host for the antagonist

- threats faced by the protagonist are also threats to the natural order; the plot outlines the central character's response to that threat

You DO NOT have to answer all of the above questions, but you should write in such a way as to indicate that you have **read the assigned web articles** and **seen the assigned episodes**. Once again, feel free to **write in a more informal/playful way** than you do for the Reading Responses.