Every society has its membership. Social castes have been divided into the bourgeois and the proliteriate for centuries. With the rise of industrialization and global economy, people aren’t bound to stay where their culture and social disposition sets them. Immigration has allowed for natives people all over the world to mobilize and emigrant their places of origin. Leaving one social setting an entering another does not come without cost, however. Outsiders come in all shapes, sizes and designs, seen in the melting pot of the United States, inhabitants come from the far reaches of the globe to entertain dreams of freedom and prosperity. In some cases of arrival, not all foreigners are met with the most hospitable of welcomes. In the current American culture, outsiders are seen as a threat: our adversaries. This disposition bends the nature of humans towards one of exclusivity and a “cliquesque” mentality.

One of the most original and well-known literary representations of the outsider is Mary Shelley’s monster from her novel *Frankenstien, or, The Modern Prometheus*. The monster shares the traits of an immigrant in his misunderstanding of his own nature while exploring the distant modes of culture in this new world he has come to. A second character comes to mind with this shared loneliness, the 100-foot-tall robot made famous in the 1999 film by Brad Bird, *The Iron Giant*. The Giant, as he is referred to by Hogarth in the flick, comes to Earth alone for an unknown reason. On arrival, the Giant takes up similar actions as the creature of Shelley’s mind, exploring and scraping for food. They share a disposition of unsureness in the meaning behind their existence in this new world. Just as the immigrant
is lost in a new world, with little help from society, the Giant is able to replicate the similar notions of the immigrant as a modern-day reiteration of the original “Frankenstein’ Monster”. The reincarnation of The Iron Giant as a Frankenstein story helps show the struggle of outsiders now through the many labels and interactions that societal norms force upon anyone that is considered different.

Before jumping into the large discussion of the immigrant in the United States, the Iron Giant must first be clarified as a true reincarnation of Frankenstein’s monster. Stemming from the early 1800 literary character, the Giant shares similarities with the Creation in origin. By a stretch of imagination, the basis of all fiction, the two outsiders can be said to have a genesis in closely related terrain. The Giant is rumored to be an “invader from Mars” or an “attacker from the Red Nation” of Russia. In a comparative manner, the creation’s semi-human form comes from the earth, but his mind must be of a different place. Unknown to a large population of viewers, one of the scenes cut from the film shows the Giant on a faraway planet, before he comes to know earth.

The relative displacement from society brings both characters into the same light, that of one who does not belong. Most of those who come from a different land, or have a feeling of misbalancing, understand that even when they are not being completely singled out, they still feel as if the spotlight is on them. Reidar Ommundsen accomplishes a great feat by underlining the many hardships that immigrants face based solely on the way in which they are framed in society.

In his essay “Framing Unauthorized Immigrants: The Effects of Labels on Evaluations”, Ommundsen acknowledges the many obstacles that arise from the social norms that accompany dealings with illegal aliens. The term alien could not be more accurate for the character of discussion. Looking at what society states on the fact of an extraterrestrial life form, the idea of an “alien” is not the most appealing verbage to hear thrown around the household. When making conversation over a certain party to another person, a speaker is typically drawn to describe the traits of that party. What
the author attempts to make known is the arousal of social stigmas from the characterization of certain peoples in a number of ways. By designating titles to the persons associated with a group, the group and its members appear to acquire the traits associated. Whether the persons actually represent these stigmas is negligible to whether others outside of the group believe it or not.

Seen in everyday life with racial and ethnic stereotypes, people of every culture are inclined to make presumptions and premonitions about the actions and lifestyles of those belonging to other societal groups. The formation of ideas regarding differing social groups stems from the many competing factors in a culture, one of which is fear. By the intimidation of a member of a group, one can for opinions on the group through their membership. What does all this relativistic language have to do with the giant metal robot looming in this paper? Just that, the relation between an idea and an object. The way that one influences the other is appropriated through social determination, expedited by the language that a society upholds. When American culture labels some immigrant as illegal, the negative stigma associated with all criminals is plastered on the entirety of the social group. While some say that yes, some illegal immigrants are a threat to society through this lawless action, others even go as far to associate this threat with the entirety of the group.

The mentality of a social system is determined not completely by its natives or the foreigners, but through the interactions that they have with one another. In his essay on immigrants and the American worker, George Borjas points out some of the positive and negative effects that immigrants, legal and illegal, have on the American household.

The average annual salary of the middle and working class American man has been known to drop by up to 1,400$ due to an uneven influx of immigrants in their area. This change in lifestyle is considered untasteful for most Americans, as is understandable. The author makes this connection while also noting that the least privileged social classes are at most risk of negative impact to a large
influx of immigrants to their community. One could ask the following question: why does all of this immigration talk relate to the topic at hand? When put into a new perspective, perhaps the Leitch’s lens from his essay “A Theory for (or Against) Rereading”, an audience can pick up on many themes of immigration and acceptance throughout the film.

With the plot of The Iron Giant taking place in the post-World War II era called “The Second Red Scare”, tensions were high between the American people and the Russians. Not only were the countries at odds with one another, but the citizens of both countries were both shown to hold passionate beliefs against the opposing country. Highlighted in the film on multiple occasions, the cast takes jabs at their “communist enemy”. Partially for having reason to protect themselves, but partially for fear of Russia, American culture was wound around the idea of intolerance for outsiders.

In rewatching the film over a dozen times in a matter if two weeks, I was able to pull many new plot points and hints from the production that I did not pick up on in my youth. By examination of the film through Leitch’s lens, I noticed the many impacts that the Giant had on the community in his arrival. At first the “invader from Mars” was aided and welcomed, by Hogarth that is. As time passed on, certain figures like Kent Mansley viewed the monster as a threat. Similar to the treatment of immigrants in a society, many members have differing opinions on the new members of a community. Drawn from the continued interpretation of the film and one of its central characters is that the Iron Giant represents the outsider in any community.

In continuing use of this lens, the novel by Mary Shelley depicts Frankenstien’s monster in a similar light. Entering the scene with excitement, the monster soon becomes feared and marked as malformed by his creator. He is labeled an outsider. In a way that parallels this, the Iron Giant will also be labeled an outsider nearly 200 years later. The difference between the two comes to reason by the
audiences of the two productions. The Iron giant is created to be a more likable character for his audience, however, both characters act as outsiders in the film.

In conclusion, the idea that outsiders are abused and misunderstood because of reasons they cannot control stands out in the reincarnation of the Iron Giant as a Frankenstein story. The characters of the two monsters come from a distant land in search of their own purpose, only to be ridiculed by society for their lack of connection to others around them. One can look to these characters for inspiration and knowledge on the struggle to fit into society, only to realize one thing: the struggle should not be for the outsider to gain acceptance, but for the natives to be accepting of others and their differences. A question to be asked in continuing this mentality is how does one go about accepting another into their society? Does it start with you reaching out, or with by attempting to understand another’s life?
Citations


