***Frankenstein and Its Classics: The Modern Prometheus from Antiquity to Science Fiction*, ed. Jesse Weiner, Benjamin Eldon Stevens and Brett M. Rogers, Bloomsbury Academic, 2018, pp. xiv, 273, paper, £21.99.**

**The bicentenary of the publication of *Frankenstein* has been marked by a flurry of new publications about this classic including *Making the Monster*, *Global Frankenstein*, and *Vault of Frankenstein*. Most of these studies examine the genesis of the novel and its subsequent incorporation into popular culture. *Frankenstein and Its Classics* connects with both of these approaches, but with the specific brief, as the editors state, of tracing the novel’s “classical filiations.” The volume presents twelve essays, in the majority of cases by classical specialists, all in their different ways taking bearings from Mary Shelley’s famous subtitle *The Modern Prometheus.* One question which recurs throughout these essays is whether Victor Frankenstein is a “worthy successor” of Prometheus or is being presented as a satirical figure. More broadly, the contributors present different arguments as to how Mary Shelley engages with the classical past and what light her novel sheds on these earlier narratives.**

**In the opening essay of the collection Genevieve Lively introduces an issue which recurs through many of these pieces. There is common agreement that Mary Shelley was well-read in the classics, but which version of the Prometheus story would have been in her mind when working on her novel? Some contributors admit uncertainty, but by careful detective work Lively comes to the conclusion that she used George Sandys’ 1632 edition of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* complete with its mediating commentary and illustrations. The former draws an analogy, for instance, between the birth of Prometheus and Genesis. Martin Priestman takes up the same issue in discussing the Prometheus stories, plumping finally for those by Ovid and Aeschylus. Apart from these questions of sources, Priestman connects electricity with the fire-stealing myth and has valuable contextual material to offer, specifically Mary Shelley’s likely use of Erasmus Darwin’s *The Theory of Nature* (1803) and the emergence of life from inorganic matter. David A. Gapp’s contribution diverges from most of the others in focusing on the 1815 Tambora volcanic eruption, which is juxtaposed to the following “Year without a Summer,” but without proposing a perception at the time of the two phenomena being related. Finally the first section of the volume concludes with a wide-ranging discussion by Matthew Gumpert of the sublime. In contrast with Kant’s theoretical position, he argues that the Creature can be read as a personification of the sublime if the latter is taken to be seeable, not the opposite. Drawing on Hesiod’a account of the creation of Pandora as a being manufactured from parts, Gumpert locates Victor’s horror in his tendency to see the Creature as a spectacle, not a being. This suggestive argument opens up new avenues of analysis focusing, among other things, on how far the Creature is actually described. Given the loose popular accounts of the novel, the term “monster” is only rarely used in the present volume and is sometimes explicitly debated.**

**The second section of the collection moves our attention on to later adaptations of *Frankenstein*, although this distinction only really applies to the later essays. Benjamin Eldon Stevens for one stays with the classics in discussing May Shelley’s use of Apuleius’ *Golden Ass*, scrupulously documenting her reading of the “Cupid and Psyche” story to gloss no less than three bedroom tableaux in the novel and extending consideration to her later novel *The Last Man*. Carl A. Rubino notes the addition of an assistant for Victor in versions from an 1823 stage adaptation onwards into subsequent film versions, arguing that this figure offers an apparently “rational explanation” of Victor’s actions. At the same time, Rubino takes us back to Lucretius to reinforce the view that scientific futures remain essentially unpredictable. Nese Devenot takes us some distance from the novel to consider the case of Timothy Leary’s self-mythicizing as a latter-day Prometheus stealing the “fire” of psychedelic drugs from the establishment. Essentially the essay presents an extended analogy between Leary and Victor Frankenstein, the former casting himself as a pivotal figure in contemporary science. Apart from fleshing out a view of Victor as both self-aggrandizing and self-deceiving, it isn’t clear how far further into the novel such an analogy can take us. There are striking resemblances between Victor’s creation of a new being and Leary’s appropriation of a convict called John in *High Priest*. What would make these resemblances even stronger would be evidence from Leary’s writing of allusions to *Frankenstein*. In a sense we are on firmer ground when Jesse Weiner examines Bill Morrison’s 2010 film *Spark of Being*, because by his own admission Morrison re-read the novelwhen beginning the project and the credits announced the film as a “re-telling of the Frankenstein myth.” Her analysis extends into a whole discussion of the concept of monstrosity as involving hybridity and visual revelation. Weiner’s discussion is one of the most useful in the volume, not least because she notes the variety of terms used to designate the Creature, including the little-noted “daemon.” Emma Hammond stays with film, picking up cues from the reviewers of Alex Garland’s 2015 *Ex Machina* to consider the latter’s disturbance of gender binaries, and in the concluding essay Brett M. Rogers focuses on instances of post-human reproduction in Science Fiction. He takes two works for particular attention: Ridley Scott’s 2012 film *Prometheus* and the comic book sequence *Ody-C*, started in 2014. Once again it is stressed that the Prometheus myth is not a singular narrative but a plurality from which Mary Shelley selected to serve her purposes in the novel. This section of the essay forms a preamble about the shifting nature of discourse which serves as a springboard into Scott’s depiction of shifting identities and cultural misreadings. These are further contrasted with the “gender-flipped” alterations of Homer to be found in *Ody-C*. The scholarship of the contributors is evident throughout this volume, which combines new approaches to *Frankenstein* with new contexts. The volume concludes with a useful list of works inspired by the novel.**

**David Seed**

**Liverpool University**