

MARY SHELLEY'S
**THE MORTAL
IMMORTAL**



CHRIS MURRAY

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The Mortal Immortal (1833) by Mary Shelley
Adaptation written by Chris Murray
Artwork by Nick Johnson
Edited by Daniel Cook

UniVerse

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Mary Shelley's short story 'The Mortal Immortal' was published in 1833 and sees a pompous apprentice to the infamous alchemist Cornelius Agrippa comically mistaking an immortality elixir for a cure for unrequited love. The story is grimly funny. Agrippa struggles to find reliable apprentices following an accident which may have summoned a demon. Winzy, the somewhat lazy protagonist of the story, leaves his services but is forced back by his less than faithful love interest, Bertha, who senses a payday. Distracted by Bertha's infidelity, Winzy neglects his work and ruins an experiment, then proceeds to drink the potion that he has been told is a cure for love. Little does he know that the potion actually grants seemingly eternal life and youth. He wins over Bertha, but the farce turns to tragicomedy when Bertha realizes that her husband cannot age. Outliving his wife and everyone else he loves, Winzy craves death. Given the themes of loss and mourning, the story has attracted biographical interpretations: some critics read it as a fantasy of overcoming death, with Winzy becoming a proxy for Mary's deceased (and eternally young) husband Percy Bysshe Shelley. In this strange story gothic themes meet Shelley's often underappreciated wit. The dark humour masks real pain.

This adaptation, with wonderful artwork by Nick Johnson, shifts the timeline of the story by over a century, having Winzy survive into the twentieth century. Incidentally, in one of those moments of alchemical magic that sometimes occurs when writing stories, the idea to have Winzy trial his immortality at the Trinity test site in 1945 was inspired by the line, uttered when Winzy contemplates suicide, 'I shall adopt more resolute means, and, by scattering and annihilating the atoms that compose my frame, set at liberty the life imprisoned within.' Imagine the shock and delight upon realising that the date that opens the story, July 16th 1833, matched perfectly with the date of the Trinity test – July 16th 1945!

Spooky!

Daniel Cook and Chris Murray

Dundee, 2026



THE MORTAL IMMORTAL

JULY 16, 1945.

THIS IS A MEMORABLE ANNIVERSARY FOR ME; ON IT I COMPLETE MY FOUR HUNDRED AND THIRTY-FIFTH YEAR.

MY NAME IS WINZY, AND I AM IMMORTAL.



OR AM I?

I DETECTED A GRAY HAIR AMIDST MY BROWN LOCKS THIS VERY DAY -- THAT SURELY SIGNIFIES DECAY.

OR WAS IT CONCEALED THERE FOR FOUR HUNDRED YEARS?

BUT HOW DID THIS COME TO PASS? IN MY YOUTH, IN 1530, I WAS APPRENTICE TO CORNELIUS AGRIPPA, THE GREAT ALCHEMIST.

ONE DAY, WHEN MY MASTER AND I WERE ON A TRIP, A FELLOW APPRENTICE APPARENTLY CONJURED A FOUL FIEND.

WHETHER THE STORY WAS TRUE OR NOT, AFTER THAT MY MASTER COULD RETAIN NO SERVANTS OR APPRENTICES.



BEING HIS MOST SKILLED APPRENTICE BUT LIVING IN DESPERATE POVERTY, HE OFFERED ME RICHES TO STAY, BUT I REFUSED.

I THOUGHT ONLY OF MY BELOVED BERTHA, BUT SHE HAD AN IMPATIENT SPIRIT AND GREW ANGRY AT THE OBSTACLES THAT PREVENTED OUR UNION.

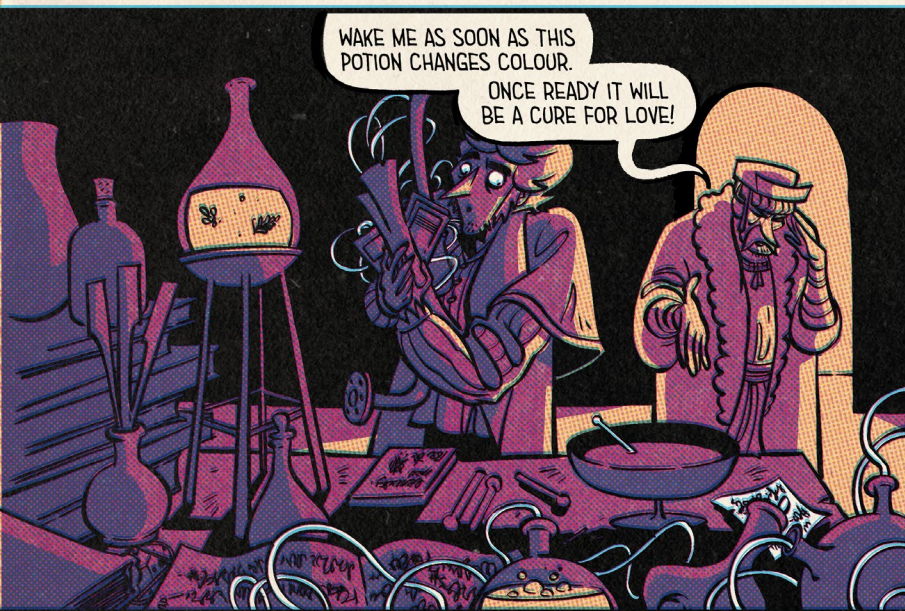


GET BACK THERE AND TAKE THAT MONEY!



I WENT BACK TO WORK HELPING MY MASTER DEVELOP A MYSTERIOUS ELIXIR. WE WORKED DAY AND NIGHT FOR MONTHS.

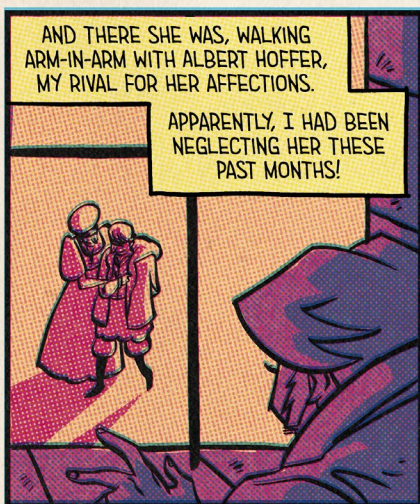




WAKE ME AS SOON AS THIS
POTION CHANGES COLOUR.
ONCE READY IT WILL
BE A CURE FOR LOVE!



MY MIND
DRIFTED FROM
MY WORK TO
BERTHA.



AND THERE SHE WAS, WALKING
ARM-IN-ARM WITH ALBERT HOFFER,
MY RIVAL FOR HER AFFECTIONS.

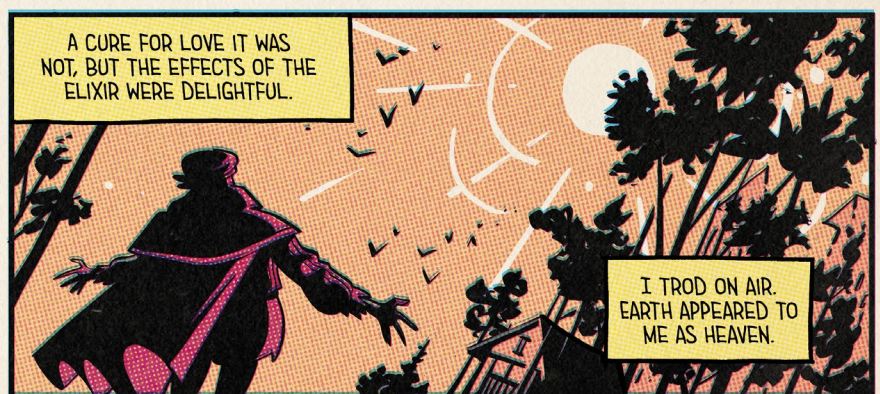
APPARENTLY, I HAD BEEN
NEGLECTING HER THESE
PAST MONTHS!



"A CURE FOR
LOVE?" LET IT
BE SO!

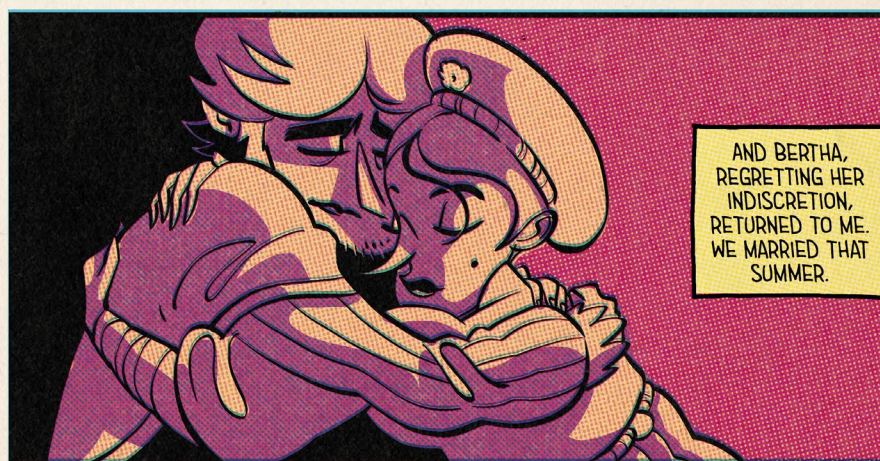


MY ELIXIR!
IT IS RUINED! WHY DOST THOU
NOT WAKE ME?



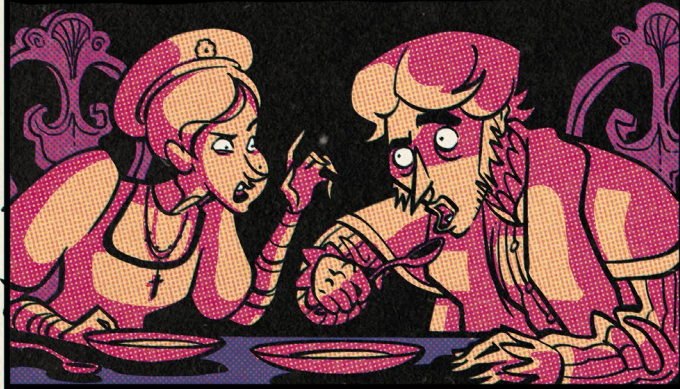
A CURE FOR LOVE IT WAS
NOT, BUT THE EFFECTS OF THE
ELIXIR WERE DELIGHTFUL.

I TROD ON AIR.
EARTH APPEARED TO
ME AS HEAVEN.

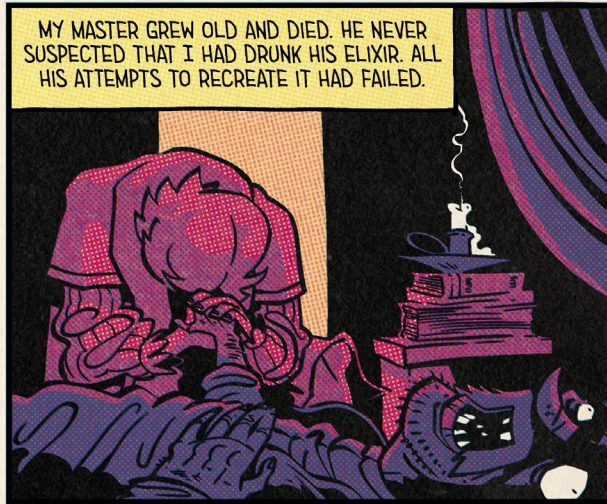


AND BERTHA,
REGRETTING HER
INDISCRETION,
RETURNED TO ME.
WE MARRIED THAT
SUMMER.

YEARS PASSED. OUR UNION WAS CHILDLESS, BUT HAPPY. IT WAS BERTHA WHO FIRST NOTICED MY CEASELESS VITALITY AND THAT I HAD NOT AGED A DAY SINCE OUR WEDDING.



MY MASTER GREW OLD AND DIED. HE NEVER SUSPECTED THAT I HAD DRUNK HIS ELIXIR. ALL HIS ATTEMPTS TO RECREATE IT HAD FAILED.



AFTER HE WAS GONE, I READ HIS MOST SECRET NOTES AND ALCHEMICAL MANUSCRIPTS.



ONLY THEN WAS THE PURPOSE OF HIS LIFE'S WORK CLEAR TO ME. HE HAS SOUGHT THE SECRET OF IMMORTALITY -- AND DIED NOT KNOWING THAT HE HAD FOUND IT!

AS THE YEARS PASSED, BERTHA CAME TO BELIEVE ME CURSED.

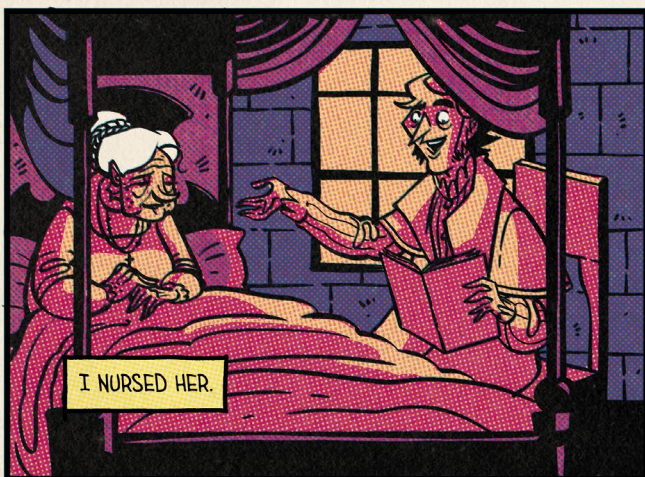


WE WERE OBLIGED TO MOVE FAR AWAY, TO WHERE NO ONE KNEW US.

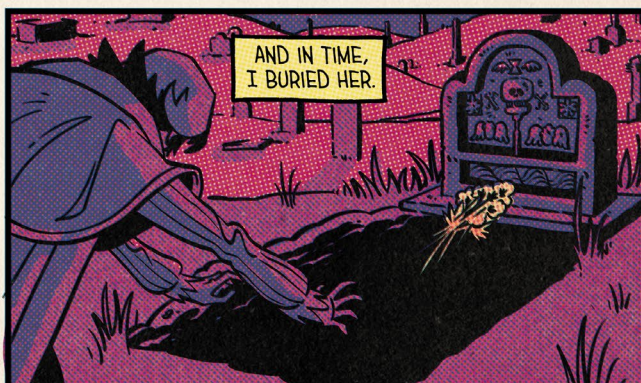
THUS BEGAN A PATTERN WE WOULD FOLLOW FOR THE REST OF OUR LIVES TOGETHER.



I NURSED HER.



AND IN TIME, I BURIED HER.



SHE HAD BEEN MINE IN YOUTH, SHE WAS MINE IN AGE, AND AT LAST, WHEN I HEAPED THE SOD OVER HER CORPSE, I WEPT TO FEEL THAT I HAD LOST ALL THAT REALLY BOUND ME TO HUMANITY.



WAS I TRULY IMMORTAL?
WOULD SWORD, GUN, FIRE OR
WATER END ME?

I DID NOT WISH TO RISK
MY SOUL TO FIND OUT, AND
I DID NOT WANT ANOTHER
TO BECOME A CAIN ON
MY ACCOUNT.

I RESOLVED TO TAKE A
PERILOUS JOURNEY. I SHALL
PUT MY IMMORTALITY TO THE
TEST, AND REST FOR EVER...

...OR RETURN, THE
WONDER AND BENEFACTOR
OF THE HUMAN SPECIES.

I HAVE CHOSEN TO ADOPT
THE MOST RESOLUTE OF MEANS...

...AND, BY SCATTERING AND
ANNIHILATING THE ATOMS THAT
COMPOSE MY FRAME...

...SET AT LIBERTY
THE LIFE IMPRISONED
WITHIN.

THE END

CONTRIBUTOR BIOGRAPHIES



Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley (née Godwin; 1797-1851) was an English writer best known for her gothic novel *Frankenstein: or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818), which many scholars view as the first major work of modern science fiction. Her mother was the pioneering feminist Mary Wollstonecraft, who died giving birth to her, and her father was the radical philosopher William Godwin. Concerned about his daughter's wayward nature, Godwin arranged for Mary to spend time with the Baxter family near Dundee in the summer of 1812 (and intermittently after that).

In the summer of 1814, Mary returned to London, where she entered into a scandalous relationship with the young radical poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, by whom she got pregnant. Effectively outcast to continental Europe, in

1816 the Shelleys stayed at the Villa Diodati, a manor close to Lake Geneva, along with Claire Clairmont, Lord Byron and his physician John Polidori. The weather was unseasonably wretched as a major volcanic eruption had caused the "Year without Summer", so the group spent their time competing in story writing competitions.

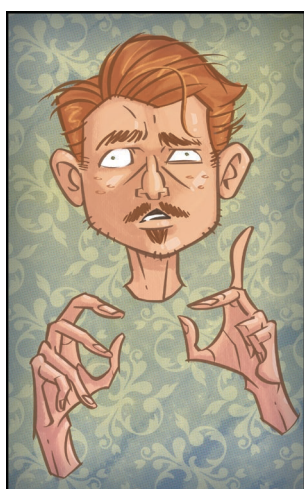
Tortured by nightmares and ill-health, and spurred by creative rivalry, she revisited a literary work that had first stirred in her mind while living in Dundee, *Frankenstein*. In 1818, the year in which her novel was first published, the Shelleys relocated to Italy.

In 1822, her husband drowned when his sailing boat sank during a storm near Viareggio. He was 29 years old. Mary eventually returned to England to develop her own career as a professional author. While her writing covered a wide range of genres and forms, above all she continued to excel in fiction, with such works as the apocalyptic *The Last Man* (1826), the historical *Valperga* (1823) and *Perkin Warbeck* (1830), and her final two novels, *Lodore* (1835) and *Falkner* (1837). Despite—or perhaps as a result of—her immense productivity, her health deteriorated markedly until she eventually died at the relatively young age of 53.

Today Mary Shelley is recognised as a prominent figure in the British gothic tradition, and her wider body of works, including her short stories, have begun to receive the attention they deserve.



Chris Murray is Professor of Comics Studies and English in the Division of Humanities, University of Dundee. He is programme director of the MLitt in Writing for the Creative Economies, director of the Comics Studies Creative Research Hub and co-editor of *Studies in Comics* (Intellect) and *UniVerse Comics*. He has collaborated with comics artists to produce several comics for research and engagement purposes. This includes writing scripts for a number of educational comics, a series of comics about British superheroes, and several adaptations of science fiction literature, including Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Karel Čapek's *R.U.R.*, Olaf Stapledon's *Odd John*, and several stories by Robert Duncan Milne.



Nick Johnson is a writer, director, producer and cartoonist living in Moh'kins'tsis - Calgary Alberta, Canada. He has an Illustration Degree from Alberta University of the Arts and a Masters in Comics and Graphic Novels from University of Dundee, Scotland. He is the writer, director and producer of the animated feature film *Sunburnt Unicorn* which made its World Premiere at the Annecy International Animation Film Festival in 2024 and is now streaming on Amazon Prime and YouTube. He teaches illustration and character design at AUArts and finds inspiration in Can Lit, horror fiction, Proust, the X-Men, and the ghosts of Utopia.



Daniel Cook is a Professor of English at the University of Dundee, where he teaches eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature, as well as the Gothic tradition. He is the author of *Frankenstein Retold*, *Gulliver's Afterlives*, *Walter Scott and Short Fiction*, *Reading Swift's Poetry*, and *Thomas Chatterton and Neglected Genius, 1760-1830*. His edited and co-edited books include *The Cambridge Companion to Gulliver's Travels*, *Austen After 200*, and *The Afterlives of Eighteenth-Century Fiction*. With Sharon Ruston he is a General Editor of *The Oxford Complete Works of Mary Shelley* (15 volumes) and co-editor of *The Oxford Handbook of Mary Shelley*. With Nick Groom and Maisha Wester he is a series editor of *Gothic Legacies* for Bloomsbury.



THE MORTAL IMMORTAL

