

= Mounseer Nongtongpaw =

Mounseer Nongtongpaw is an 1808 poem once thought to have been written by the Romantic writer Mary Shelley as a child . It is now believed that the author was theatrical writer John Taylor . The poem is an expansion of the entertainer Charles Dibdin 's song of the same name and was published as part of eighteenth @-@ century philosopher William Godwin 's Juvenile Library . A series of comic stanzas on French and English stereotypes , Mounseer Nongtongpaw pillories John Bull for his inability to understand French . It was illustrated by Godwin 's friend William Mulready .

= = Publication details = =

Mounseer Nongtongpaw was originally published by William Godwin 's publishing firm , M. J. Godwin , in 1808 as part of its Juvenile Library series . English editions have been located for 1811 , 1812 , 1823 , and 1830 and Philadelphia editions have been located for 1814 and c . 1824 . The original edition was illustrated by a protégé of Godwin , William Mulready . Shelley biographer Emily Sunstein speculates that some of the verses may have been written to match illustrations that were already designed . The copper plate engravings are reproduced in Peter and Iona Opie 's Nursery Companion .

= = Structure and plot = =

Mounseer Nongtongpaw is based on a popular 1796 song of the same name by the entertainer Charles Dibdin . Dibdin 's original song mocks English and French stereotypes in five eight @-@ line stanzas , particularly " John Bull 's " refusal to learn French . John Bull makes numerous inquiries to which he always receives the same response : " Monsieur , je vous n 'entends pas " (" Monsieur , I don 't understand you ") , which he mistakenly interprets as " Mounseer Nongtongpaw " . He comes to believe that the Palais Royal , Versailles , and a beautiful woman ? the sights he sees while touring France ? belong to this mysterious personage . When he comes upon a funeral and receives the same response , he concludes that all of Nongtongpaw 's wealth could not save him from death . Mounseer Nongtongpaw expands Dibdin 's comic verses , adding more events to the narrative in shorter four @-@ line stanzas , such as inquiries about a tavern feast , a shepherd 's flock , a coach and four , and a hot @-@ air balloon :

= = Attribution = =

Mounseer Nongtongpaw was first attributed to the ten @-@ and @-@ a @-@ half @-@ year @-@ old Mary Godwin (later Mary Shelley) in A Nursery Companion (1980) by Peter and Iona Opie . Don Locke supported this view in his biography of William Godwin , Mary 's father , that same year . The attribution rested on a 1960 advertisement by a book dealer , which printed part of a 2 January 1808 letter from William Godwin to an unknown correspondent :

I therefore enclose two scribbles with which I would not otherwise have troubled you That in small writing is the production of my daughter in her eleventh year , and is strictly modelled , as far as her infant talent would allow , on Dibdin 's song The whole object is to keep up the joke of Nong Tong Paw being constantly taken for the greatest man in France .

" Dibdin 's song " refers to the popular song by Charles Dibdin on which the poem is based . The Opies wrote that " the presumption must be that the verses Godwin printed were those by his daughter " . In the 1831 introduction to Frankenstein , Shelley described her early childhood writing as that of " a close imitator ? rather doing what others had done , than putting down the suggestions of my own mind " .

However , after the rediscovery of the entire letter , doubts emerged regarding this attribution :

Dear Sir ,

In the midst of our short conversation of yesterday , & still more pleasant than short , you expressed a wish to receive a sketch in prose of the thing we desired . I am sure your kindness renders it a

duty incumbent on me in return , to afford you every facility in my power . I therefore inclose two scribbles with which I would not otherwise have troubled you . That in small writing is the production of my daughter in her eleventh year , & is strictly modelled , as ar as [sic] her infant talents would allow , on Dibdin 's song . This may answer the purpose of a prose sketch . The other is written by a young man of twenty . It is rather unintelligible : but the two first two stanzas may afford you a hint respecting the first two designs .

The more what you shall favour us with shall purely be your own , the more exquisite I am well satisfied it will be found . The whole object is to keep up the joke of Nong Tong Paw being constantly taken for the greatest man in France .

Believe me , with a thousand thanks ,

My dear sir ,

Very sincerely yours

W Godwin

Jan. 2 , 1808 .

May we send to you at ten or eleven to @-@ morrow morning ?

If you should have any thing to communicate , & should address it to Mr. Hooley , 41 , Skinner Street , Snow Hill , it will reach me in safety .

The complete letter suggests that the " small writing " was a prose piece , although Sunstein , the former owner of the letter (which is now held by The Carl H. Pforzheimer Collection of Shelley and His Circle) , argues that the wording is open to interpretation . She claims that " read in its entirety , [the letter] indicates that Mary Godwin wrote the initial revised text for Nongtongpaw , but not the final version " . She argues " that Mary Godwin 's revision was usable for a ' prose sketch ' does not necessarily mean that she wrote it in prose " .

According to Jeanne Moskal , one of the editors of the most recent definitive edition of Mary Shelley 's works , " It can be deduced from the letter , and corroborated by other circumstantial evidence uncovered by Sunstein , that the correspondent had been invited to write a new version of Dibdin 's song and that the correspondent and the composer of the 1808 text were therefore one and the same . " This man was probably John Taylor , whom Sunstein describes as " a veteran theatrical and miscellaneous writer ... best known for his narrative recital poem ' Monsieur Tonson ' (1796) " , which is a comic poem similar to Mounseer Nongtongpaw . Thus , in this authoritative collection of Mary Shelley 's works , the poem is not attributed to her .

= = Significance = =

Mounseer Nongtongpaw represents the beginning of Mary Shelley 's collaborative writing career , although it is no longer possible to reconstruct her actual contributions . Her sketch was given to the author of the published work as a way to inspire him . What precisely he drew from that text is , however , unknown .