

WHITLEY STOKES AND THE COMPOSITION
OF DANTE ROSSETTI'S "MY FATHER'S CLOSE"

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Among the works in Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *Poems* (1870) are two poems that are identified in their titles as "Old French" in origin, "My Father's Close. (*Old French.*)" – adapted from *Les princesses au pommier doux* or *Derrier' chez mon père* – and "John of Tours. (*Old French.*)" – adapted from *Le roi Renaud*. Both poems have been printed in many versions (Doncieux 48-52; 84-124). Some proposals have been made as to the source in which Rossetti found the originals that he translated and adapted, and various dates for the composition of both have been put forward (see Lang, McGann, and Marsh below). It is now possible – in the case of "My Father's Close" at least – to pin down exactly where Rossetti found his model, when, and under what circumstances.

In March 1856, Whitley Stokes (1830-1909), a jurist and philologist, wrote from London to his sister Margaret (1832-1900), a writer on archaeology, in Dublin, with some news and literary gossip. It is worth quoting this letter extensively so as to indicate the type and range of comment that is often found in Stokes's letters:

3 New Sq[ua]re
[Lincoln's Inn, London]
March 29/56

My dearest Margherita

... I am glad you find so much to love in Browning. I got hold of the book last night, and, when yr letter arrived, read *Karshish* carefully.¹ It is in many ways quite marvellous. Just study the way the poet dives himself into East. The hundred [deleted word] touches by wh. ~~th~~ he brings before you the Arab, the credulous physician, the keen-eyed man of science, the kindly heart. Look at the last line of p. 91 & the first of p. 92. The saffron simile in 95 – that way of measuring distance in 92 and in 101 "He merely looked with his large eyes on me" – & then the meeting with Lazarus in 105. How exquisitely too is suggest-