

## A POSSIBLE PICTORIAL INSPIRATION FOR CHRISTINA ROSSETTI'S "THE PRINCE'S PROGRESS"

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It is well known that Christina Rossetti's "The Prince's Progress" had its origin in the dirge beginning "Too late for love, too late for joy" that she wrote on 11 October 1861 and, at the suggestion of her brother Dante Gabriel, extended into a narrative poem in January 1865 (*Complete Poems*, 1:108, 266). It does not appear to have been noticed, however, that "Too late for love, too late for joy" may itself have had its origin, at least in part, in *Too Late* (fig. 1), a painting by the minor Pre-Raphaelite artist William Lindsay Windus (1822-1877)<sup>1</sup> that was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1859.

Both as a poem in its own right (it was published as such in *Macmillan's Magazine* in May 1863) and as the concluding portion of "The Prince's Progress," "Too late for love, too late for joy" is an indictment of deleterious male tardiness: the Prince's loitering en route to the princess – in the narrative he is distracted on his journey first by a "wave-haired milkmaid," then by an ancient necromancer, and finally by a bevy of attentive women – results in his arriving too late to claim her as his bride. "'Ten years ago, five years ago, / One year ago, / Even then you had arrived in time,'" explain the princess's attendants to whom the dirge is given in the narrative; "'Then you would have known her living face / Which now you cannot know....'"

"You should have wept her yesterday,  
Wasting upon her bed:  
But wherefore should you weep today  
That she is dead?"

(*Complete Poems*, 109-10)

The similarities between this scenario and Windus's painting are striking and suggestive. As described by Ford Madox Brown many years later, *Too Late* is an "intensely pathetic ... represent[ation] [of] a poor girl in the last stage of