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Oscar Wilde’s “Dies Irae” Sonnet: Composition, Revision, Publication

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Oscar Wilde converted to Catholicism on his deathbed in November 1900. His late conversion was perhaps the product of a decades-long intrigue with the Roman Catholic Church that burgeoned during the writer’s time at Oxford, contrary to his Irish Protestant upbringing. Wilde’s “Romanism” and “Popery” would not only inspire two trips to Italy during his time as an undergraduate—one in summer 1875 and the other in spring 1877—but also an entire chapter titled “Rosa Mystica” in his poetry collection *Poems* (1881, revised 1882), which would feature religious lyrics such as “Rome Unvisited,” “San Miniato,” “Ave Maria Plena Gratia,” and the subject of this commentary, “Sonnet. On Hearing the Dies Iræ Sung in the Sistine Chapel” (Vernier 42). Despite the efforts and influence of individuals such as Wilde’s friend David Hunter Blair, a Catholic convert, and Father Sebastian Bowden, a priest with “a reputation for securing fashionable converts” (Sturgis 233), Wilde remained wavering between “Popery” and “Paganism” throughout most of his life, and his poetry collection, *Poems*, reflects his conflicting interests (Vernier 41).

It was through investigating Wilde’s turbulent relationship with Roman Catholicism that I encountered the first known manuscript of “Sonnet. On Hearing the Dies Iræ Sung in the Sistine Chapel”—then titled “Sonnet (Written after Hearing Mozart’s ‘Dies Irae’ Sung in Magdalen Chapel)”—at the William Andrews Clark Memorial Library in Los Angeles. The manuscript was submitted to the editor of *Good Words* magazine in 1877, just a few months after Wilde had returned from Rome, and became the first of five known distinct versions of the sonnet that will be examined in this commentary. The differences between each version of the sonnet are of particular interest in garnering insights into Wilde’s editing process, especially when examined in the context of his life and personal interests.

The title of the sonnet, which does not reach its final form until its third iteration, is especially important as an indicator of Wilde’s willingness to tailor his work to achieve publication; it is a marker, perhaps, of the instability of Wilde’s poetry at the time, which was constantly edited and re-edited not only to fit his own aesthetic vision but also to appeal to his audience of editors including the Reverend Donald Macleod of *Good Words* and the Reverend William MacIlwaine of the *Lyra Hibernica Sacra*. A rejoinder to the biblical concept of Judgment Day, the sonnet is definitively Christian, demonstrating Wilde’s intimate familiarity with the Bible and reflecting his interest in Jesus Christ as a symbol of compassion and mercy. Though the piece was likely inspired by Wilde’s engagement with Roman Catholicism, specifically during his time in Rome, his revisions also demonstrate that, with simple alterations to the title, the piece can present itself as Catholic, non-denominational, and even passingly Protestant. Accordingly, Wilde’s edits to “Sonnet. On Hearing the Dies Iræ Sung in the Sistine Chapel” convey not only his interest in Roman Catholicism but also his willingness to reformulate his work for non-Catholic publications that would likely otherwise outrightly reject his Roman Catholic sentiments.

This discussion will examine the five versions of Wilde’s “Sonnet. On Hearing the Dies Iræ Sung in the Sistine Chapel,” considering both his religious and artistic interests as well as those as a young poet endeavoring to achieve publication in England. Wilde’s edits across each iteration of the poem manifest his leveraging these sometimes conflicting intentions over five years as he first fails to achieve publication in a Protestant religious magazine, successfully publishes in a non-denominational collection of Irish poets, repurposes his sonnet according to his artistic vision, and eventually publishes five editions of *Poems*, editing the sonnet twice more in the process.

In what follows, the versions of the sonnet will be examined in the order they are believed to have been written, beginning with the 1877 manuscript sent to *Good Words*, Sonnet (Written after Hearing Mozart’s ‘Dies Irae’ Sung in Magdalen Chapel)” (Appendix A), and followed by the first published version, which was published untitled as “Nay, come not thus” in the *Lyra Hibernica Sacra* in 1878 (Appendix B). Though the date of the second manuscript, titled “Sonnet. On Hearing the ‘Dies Irae’ Sung in the Sistine Chapel” is unclear, based on Wilde’s revisions, it was likely written after the *Lyra Hibernica Sacra* version and before the first edition of *Poems*, sometime between 1878 and 1881. The second manuscript, the only known manuscript with the same title as the final published version, currently belongs to the private collection of Jeremy Mason, who kindly shared images of the text for this commentary (Appendix C). The fourth and fifth versions of the sonnet—both published as “Sonnet. On Hearing the “Dies Iræ” Sung in the Sistine Chapel”—are located in the first (Appendix D) and fifth (Appendix E) editions of Wilde’s *Poems*, published in 1881 and 1882, respectively, by David Bogue. The only difference in the title from the second manuscript to the final 1881 and 1882 printed versions is the addition of the ligature “æ” to the “Dies Iræ.”

In July 1877, Wilde sent a letter to the editor of *Good Words* magazine, enclosing two poem manuscripts, one titled “Easter Day” and the other titled “Sonnet (Written after Hearing Mozart’s ‘Dies Irae’ Sung in Magdalen Chapel)” (Appendix A). In the letter sent to Reverend Donald Macleod, the editor of the monthly publication, Wilde wrote quite confidently in the third person: “If accepted, Mr. Wilde would be much obliged if they [i.e., the sonnets] were printed on a full half-page, without the intersecting line, which destroys the appearance of a sonnet very much” (Wilde, letter to Donald Macleod, July 1877). He instructed that the proofs should be sent to his home address, 1 Merrion Square North, Dublin, essentially assuming his poems would be accepted for publication. Wilde likely considered *Good Words*, a popular illustrated religious magazine directed at evangelicals and nonconformists, especially of the lower middle classes, a suitable opportunity to publicize his poetry, which, at the time, resembled that of the magazine in its religious themes and imagery.

The popularity of *Good Words*—estimated at some 150,000 subscribers by 1864—would be tempting for the young aesthetic poet striving to create a name for himself in England. It is possible that, in hopes of achieving publication, Wilde adjusted his poetry to match the religious tenor of the magazine. The autumnal, agrarian imagery of Wilde’s “Dies Irae” sonnet is jarringly similar to that of “In Harvest-Time,” a poem by E. Conder Gray published in an 1877 volume of *Good Words*. “Reaper[s],” flying “birds,” and golden “sheaves” are but a few of the images presented in both poems (Gray; Wilde). Wilde, however, integrates the image of the “unsickled field” in Gray’s poem into the concluding sestet of his Petrarchan sonnet to metaphorically reject the fearful “red-flame and thundering” of Judgment Day conveyed in the Latin hymn “Dies Irae” or “Day of Wrath” (4). After the volta, Wilde instead invites the Son of God, or the “One who had no place of rest” (7), to “reap thy Harvest,” cultivating a more welcoming view of death as a natural growth into fruition and warmly anticipated reunion with God, rather than a harrowing reckoning of one’s sins.

In these final lines, Wilde emulates the religious tenor characteristic of *Good Words* by invoking the Book of Joel, a brief collection of prophetic poems in the Christian Old Testament. He specifically alludes to Joel 3:13: “Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe: come, get you down; for the press is full, the fats overflow; for their wickedness is great.” Like Wilde’s sonnet, Joel 3:13 describes Judgment Day, albeit painting a far more dismal scene. In Joel 3 and Matthew 13, God’s angels are reapers who have come to “reap” their “harvest” by punishing the wicked, whose sins have rendered them ripe for God’s judgment. Wilde echoes the Book of Joel’s utilization of apostrophe, calling on God to “Come on some autumn afternoon” (9) and “reap thy Harvest” (14), as Joel calls on God and the angels to “come” and “Put ye in the sickle.” Wilde’s poem, however, calls upon a much more sympathetic God, who comes in peace upon the “splendid fullness of the moon” (12) rather than in a storm of flames or “thundering” (4).

Wilde thus rejects the ghastly, fiery end metaphorically illustrated as Judgment Day in the Bible, instead repurposing the agricultural language of the Book of Joel to invoke a more compassionate, humanized vision of God as the “One who had no place of rest” (7). He likely derived the image of “One who had no place of rest” from Luke 9:58: “And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.” Juxtaposing God’s despotism associated with Judgment Day, Wilde presents a vision of the “Son of man” as sympathetic and self-sacrificing. Christ’s mission is to serve humanity, and he warns his disciples that, in following him, they will live a life of transience and hardship to fulfill that mission. Unlike God in the “Dies Irae” hymn or Joel 3:13, who exercises his sovereign power to punish his people, Christ in Luke 9:58 lives among and suffers for his people, illustrating God’s mercy rather than his cruelty. Though Christ offers a similar metaphor for Judgment Day in the New Testament—in the Book of Matthew—as in the Book of Joel, he also promises salvation for the “righteous” to “shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (Matthew 13:43). Wilde may have embraced this notion of Christ’s mercy in the final line of his sonnet when he suggests that humanity, or at least those who are righteous, “have waited long” and welcome God’s peaceful coming rather than fear it. Nevertheless, his implication that Christ’s teachings of “life and love” are more persuasive than threats of doom and punishment for one’s sins indicates that Wilde may have also simply denounced the biblical notion of Judgment Day altogether (3).

Thematically and stylistically, Wilde’s “Dies Irae” sonnet is consistent with that of other poetry in *Good Words*. Employing the pastoral, seasonal imagery characteristic of the monthly magazine, Wilde describes “olive[s],” “lilies,” and “doves” in the “spring,” before transitioning to “Harvest” time in the “autumn.” These subjects—“olive[s],” “lilies,” “doves,” “spring,” and “autumn,” to name a few—are found across multiple poems in an 1877 volume of *Good Words*, predominantly to evoke a religious sentiment or experience similar to that of Wilde’s in his sonnet. Though Wilde may not have revered most of the poets published in *Good Words*—with the possible exception of writers such as Thomas Hardy or Dora Greenwell—the similarity of his sonnet to works by poets such as C. Brooke and E. Conder’s Gray suggests that Wilde may have at least considered, if not drawn inspiration from, some of the poetry in *Good Words*. Perhaps Wilde was attracted to the religious tenor of the popular magazine, or, perhaps because the magazine was so popular, he simply sought to publish in it himself by emulating the style of poets who had already achieved publication. Regardless, the similarity of Wilde’s sonnet to the works of these other poets might suggest why Wilde appeared so confident in his letter to the editor.

Wilde wrote “Magdalen College, Oxford” at the end of both his letter to Reverend Donald Macleod and his manuscript itself, implying that he exercised some strategy in tailoring his efforts to achieve publication. As a young Irish poet studying at Oxford, endeavoring to publish his work in England, Wilde often purposely emphasized his membership of Magdalen College in an attempt not only to underscore his position at a prestigious university but also to “identify himself as much as possible with the English ‘Establishment’” (Vernier 35). Though five of Wilde’s early poems are still printed with “Magdalen College, Oxford” at the bottom, “Sonnet (Written after Hearing Mozart’s ‘Dies Irae’ Sung in Magdalen Chapel)” is not one of them. Wilde never published the poem under that title. At the time, Wilde’s decision to use the title to set the sonnet at Magdalen Chapel, an Anglican chapel founded on the grounds of Magdalen College, Oxford, may have been, at least partially, based on the same reasoning as his decision to sign many of his poems “Magdalen College, Oxford”—essentially, to self-promote himself through association with the prestige of the university.

Associating hearing the “Dies Irae” hymn—the event that prompts the central religious epiphany of the sonnet—with Magdalen Chapel may have also served to ground the poem in Protestantism rather than Catholicism, as the “Dies Irae” is best known for its use in the Roman Rite Requiem, or the Mass for the Dead or Funeral Mass, and Reverend Donald Macleod was a firm Protestant. Not only did Macleod become Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1895, but his brother, the original editor of *Good Words*, Norman Macleod, was also previously Moderator before he died in 1872. Thus, Wilde, likely striving to appeal to the Protestant editor, specified the location as “Magdalen Chapel” and defined the arrangement as “Mozart’s,” referring to the composer's “Dies Irae,” which begins the third section of his unfinished *Requiem in D minor*. It would have been impossible to hear Mozart’s *Requiem* at the Sistine Chapel in Rome, where instrumental music was traditionally banned, but Wilde may have listened to the piece performed at Magdalen Chapel, as the “Dies Irae” was sung in Protestant churches, as well as Catholic ones, until the 1970s. No record found could confirm that Mozart’s *Requiem* was performed at Magdalen Chapel specifically in the late 1800s; however, an article from *The Musical Times* (1904-1995) published on 1 July 1919 indicates, under the column labeled “Magdalen College Oxford,” that “Mozart’s ‘Requiem’ was sung at Ely Cathedral on May 27,” suggesting that the piece may have been played in other Anglican churches, like Magdalen Chapel, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (“The Musical Times” 362).

Regardless of whether Wilde heard Mozart’s *Requiem* at Magdalen Chapel, his apparent efforts to appeal to Reverend Donald Macleod were unsuccessful. “Sonnet (Written after Hearing Mozart’s ‘Dies Irae’ Sung in Magdalen Chapel)” was not accepted for publication in *Good Words*. However, this outcome is hardly surprising considering that “Easter Day,” the other manuscript enclosed with the “Dies Irae” sonnet, exhibited intense Catholic sentiment. The glorious depiction of the Pope in “Easter Day,” described as “Like some great God, the Holy Lord of Rome,” may well have deterred the highly Protestant Macleod. Wilde, it seems, could not entirely conceal his fascination with Catholicism from Macleod.

Wilde grappled with the idea of entering the Roman Catholic Church during his Oxford years and often expressed a desire to visit Rome, which he described as “the only city of the soul” (Sturgis 51). Though his father, a firm Protestant, and his Trinity College Classics tutor, John Pentland Mahaffy, consistently dissuaded him from converting and even from traveling to Rome, Wilde eventually voyaged to the Eternal City in spring 1877 with his college friend David Hunter Blair, a Catholic convert who arranged a meeting for Wilde with Pope Pius IX. This meeting may have inspired “Easter Day,” but the sonnet could not have been written on Easter Day in Rome—as the postscript suggests—because Wilde was in Brindisi on his way to Greece that day. This fact not only calls into question whether “Easter Day” was written in Rome at all but also whether its counterpart, the “Dies Irae” sonnet, was written at Magdalen College, Oxford, and inspired by hearing the “Dies Irae” sung there. Wilde’s subsequent changes to the sonnet’s title, which will later be examined in greater detail, further destabilize the source location of the poem, substantiating the earlier postulation that Wilde tailored the location of the sonnet to appeal to Macleod.

Wilde’s only comment regarding the pairing of the “Dies Irae” sonnet with “Easter Day” was a bold request to the editor: “Mr. Wilde would not like [the poems] both to appear in the same month, as there is a slight similarity of rhyme in them.” Wilde, who sent a version of the “Easter Day” sonnet to W.E. Gladstone in May 1877—after receiving positive feedback on his draft of “Sonnet on the Massacre of the Christians in Bulgaria”—was perhaps emboldened to submit his sonnet to *Good Words* following a second complementary response from the Protestant statesman. Though “Easter Day” could, presumably, be read as an ironic criticism of the pope’s extravagance—Wilde juxtaposes the pope’s “splendor” with a similar lonely, ever-wandering Christ figure to that of the “Dies Irae” sonnet—Macleod’s negative response suggests that the poem presented more to him as papal praise. His consequent reading of “Easter Day” as Catholic would likely contextualize the “Dies Irae” sonnet, the origin of which is a hymn commonly associated with Roman Catholic mass, as also overtly Catholic.

If Wilde intended to criticize the pope, his intentions were likely entirely pragmatic. Many sources report that Wilde adorned his room with Catholic memorabilia in the 1870s, including images of Cardinal John Henry Newman, an individual whom Wilde considered one of the Catholic Church’s “great men…like St Augustine, a good philosopher as well as a good Christian” (Sturgis 92). In his journals, Lord Ronald Gower, often cited as a model for Lord Henry Wotton in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, described Wilde as “[a] pleasant, cheery fellow, but with his long-haired head full of nonsense regarding the Church of Rome. His room filled with photographs of the Pope and of Cardinal Manning” (Stern 98). It seems clear, therefore, that Wilde was at least drawn to the aesthetics of the Catholic Church, including its papal splendor, at the time he wrote “Easter Day.” He thus likely did not intend to reproach the pope by comparing him to Christ—unless simply to appeal to a Protestant audience—but rather contemplate his interest in Catholicism.

In “Easter Day,” the speaker is allured by the aesthetics of the pope, who “wore a robe more white than foam” and “king-like, swathed himself in royal red” (Wilde 5-6). However, ultimately, his “heart st[eals] back…To One who wandered by a lonely sea”—to Christ (9-10). The poem thus presents a tension between the speaker’s attraction to the aesthetics of the Catholic Church and a potentially more profound religious interest in Christ, especially as an individualistic martyr figure. Wilde’s endearing recollection of a similar figure in the “Dies Irae” sonnet suggests that his early interest in the Catholic Church was not merely aesthetic but also potentially rooted in his interest in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. Christ reappears as an individualistic figure in several of Wilde’s subsequent works, including his 1891 essay “The Soul of Man under Socialism”—in which Christ is portrayed as both a “non-conformist” and an exemplar of sacrifice and giving—and his late work *De Profundis*, an extensive letter Wilde wrote in prison to his lover Lord Alfred (“Bosie”) Douglas, that was published after his death (Stern 110). In *De Profundis*, Wilde’s nuanced presentation of Christ as not only “the most supreme of individualists” but also an artist indicates that, though his relationship with religion was turbulent and riddled with noncommitment until his deathbed conversion, Wilde cultivated a deep and comprehensive understanding of Christ’s life and teachings (Quintus 522).

Wilde’s “Dies Irae” sonnet, however, found success a year later with Reverend William MacIlwaine, who ultimately included a revised version of the poem in his *Lyra Hibernica Sacra*. The *Lyra Hibernica Sacra* is best described as a collection of Christian hymns and poems by Irish authors ranging “from the date of Ireland’s national Saint; to the present day” (MacIlwaine VII). The title *Lyra Hibernica Sacra*, a Latin phrase that translates to “The Sacred Irish Lyre,” effectively describes the collection: Lyric poetry derives its name from the “lyra,” or “lyrem,” a stringed musical instrument played to accompany a song, “Hibernica” refers to Ireland, and “sacra” means “sacred” or “holy.” Writings by well-known Irish saints and scholars such as St. Patrick, St. Brigid, and St. Columba comprise some of the early poetry featured in the collection. Wilde and his mother, Lady Jane Francesca Wilde, who were both also published in the *Lyra Hibernica Sacra*, would have been poets of the “present day” at the time of the collection’s publication in 1878.

The *Lyra Hibernica Sacra* was perhaps the perfect home for Wilde’s ostensibly Christian, albeit denominationally ambiguous “Dies Irae” sonnet, which was ultimately published without a title in the collection (Appendix B). Despite his own ties to the Protestant church, as Incumbent of St. George’s Church, Belfast, editor Reverend William MacIlwaine prioritized the celebration of Irish Christian voices in his collection, regardless of their individual denomination. In his preface, MacIlwaine asserts that all authors in the *Lyra Hibernica Sacra* “will be found to breathe the spirit of that religion which, as a Christian nation, we all profess” regardless of their separate “attachment[s] to various religious creeds.” The editor insists that only compositions “which appeared to possess sufficient merit have been included, wholly irrespective of creed and denomination; provided only that the term sacred could be with truth applied to them, and that the writers owned Ireland as their place of birth” and that “[a]ll productions of a sectarian or party spirit, as regards religion, have been carefully excluded” (MacIlwaine IV). Christianity and Irish nationalism, for MacIlwaine, were intertwined, and he intended to provide a platform for both in his collection. MacIlwaine viewed religious separatism as a threat to Irish unity, and he created the *Lyra Hibernica Sacra* as an exemplar of Irish Christian artistry. Wilde’s “Dies Irae” sonnet, therefore, fulfilled nearly all of the requirements for publication set out by MacIlwaine: Wilde was an Irish-born poet, and his sonnet was demonstrably Christian yet free from any tangible attachment to a specific denomination, at least in the version published in this collection.

The only potential indication of denominational attachment in Wilde’s first manuscript of his “Dies Irae” sonnet was the title, which was removed and replaced with the first few words of the poem—“Nay, come not thus”—for the version published in the *Lyra Hibernica Sacra*, likely to fulfill MacIlwaine’s ecumenical objectives for the collection. For many readers, especially those unfamiliar with Magdalen Chapel, the original title would affiliate the poem with Roman Catholicism because the “Dies Irae” (as we have noted above) is best known for its use in the Roman Rite Requiem. Though the hymn was sung in other churches, such as Eastern Orthodox and Anglican churches, the association would have likely violated MacIlwaine’s anti-sectarian guidelines for the collection. Likewise, the location of “Magdalen Chapel,” an Anglican church, in the title would presumably deter MacIlwaine as much as the Catholic implication of the “Dies Irae” hymn itself. Not only would the association explicitly ground the sonnet in Anglicanism, but it would also affiliate the sonnet with England rather than Ireland, thus breaching the “distinctly and nationally Irish” constitution of the collection (MacIlwaine IV). Wilde’s removal of “Magdalen College, Oxford,” printed as the subscript to his original manuscript, can conceivably be attributed to MacIlwaine’s anti-sectarian reasoning.

Because there is no known manuscript following Wilde’s submission to *Good Words* that reflects the edits he made to his “Dies Irae” sonnet for the *Lyra Hibernica Sacra*, it cannot be determined with certainty whether Wilde revised the sonnet before submitting it to William MacIlwaine or following its acceptance into the collection. However, the Clark Library houses a letter from MacIlwaine to Wilde dated 10 March 1877, indicating their correspondence prior to the publication of the *Lyra Hibernica Sacra* in 1878. Though MacIlwaine’s letter makes no mention of the collection itself, and Wilde sent his manuscript to Macleod mere months after receiving it, the document demonstrates MacIlwaine’s esteem of Wilde’s opinion and reverence of his poetry. In his letter, MacIlwaine enclosed a manuscript of his own poem, requesting Wilde’s opinion in return. Despite the fact MacIlwaine was almost fifty years older than Wilde and more established as both a scholar and poet—he had already published numerous poems and collections at the time—MacIlwaine expressed the utmost respect for Wilde as a poet: “Before I had seen or heard your beautiful little poem I had conceived, + written one, with almost identically the same ideas! I now send you a copy of my poem” (MacIlwaine, letter to Oscar Wilde, 10 Mar. 1877).

The identity of MacIlwaine’s and Wilde’s respective poems discussed in the letter is unknown; however, it is possible that the “ideas” that they shared included their interests in Christianity and potentially even a mutual fascination with Italy. Wilde was just a few weeks from his second voyage to Italy when MacIlwaine sent his letter. At the time, he had already written many religious poems inspired by his previous trip to Italy in summer 1875 and would write many more, including his “Dies Irae” sonnet, following his trip in spring 1877; many of these poems Wilde wrote he sent to individuals he admired, including politicians like W.E. Gladstone and religious leaders like John Henry Newman, a widely known yet controversial Catholic priest and cardinal. He carried his collection of Newman’s works with him on his American tour and even read the cardinal’s works in jail just a few years before his death in 1900. As a young student at Oxford, Wilde reportedly received “high praise” from Newman after sending him a copy of “Rome Unvisited,” a poem that Wilde wrote after failing to visit Rome during his 1875 trip to Italy (Sturgis 92). It is not improbable that Wilde also sent a copy of this poem or another from his collection of poems about Italy to Reverend William MacIlwaine and that one of these is the “beautiful little poem” MacIlwaine writes of in his March 1877 letter.

MacIlwaine’s trust in Wilde with a personal manuscript demonstrates his veneration of Wilde’s poetry, likely, in part, because of its similarity to his own work. In 1861, MacIlwaine published his own poem featuring a religious vision of Italy, appropriately titled “A Vision of Italy,” which resembles many of Wilde’s poems in both its subject matter and its luxurious, sensual language. It is thus unsurprising that MacIlwaine would later include Wilde’s work in his *Lyra Hibernica Sacra* collection, especially considering that the four poems he selected, including “Nay, come not thus,” displayed great religious reverence. Given that Wilde and MacIlwaine were in close correspondence a year before the *Lyra Hibernica Sacra* was published, it is possible that MacIlwaine informed Wilde of his intentions for his collection before accepting Wilde’s poems for publication. Wilde’s revisions for the *Lyra Hibernica Sacra* version of his “Dies Irae” sonnet substantiate that he may have been familiar with the ecumenical, albeit strictly Irish-Christian intentions of MacIlwaine and accordingly revised his sonnet to appeal to the editor before sharing it with him. Yet, it is also possible that Wilde sent MacIlwaine the sonnet before making any revisions—perhaps even after facing rejection from *Good Words*—and MacIlwaine agreed to publish it in his collection after Wilde completed some suggested edits to render the poem less “sectarian.” Regardless of their origin, Wilde’s revisions for the “Nay, come not thus” version of his “Dies Irae” sonnet served primarily to reflect the philosophy of the *Lyra Hibernica Sacra* and were likely influenced, to some extent, by Wilde’s intimate exchanges with the editor.

Though Wilde’s alterations to the sonnet itself were slight, his primary objective for the “Nay, come not thus” version involved foregrounding its Christian sentiment to match the religious intentions of the collection as a whole. Perhaps the simplest of his revisions was the capitalization of the pronouns “Thy” and “Thee” to convey a greater reverence for God (lines 3, 5, 8, 14). The capitalization may have also served to immediately establish the sonnet as an invocation of God because removing the original title decontextualized the religious inspiration for the piece. Beyond these minor alterations, Wilde’s revision of “Sad olive-gardens, or a murmuring Dove” to “Sad olive-gardens, or the holy dove” refined the Christian imagery of the poem by alluding specifically to “the holy dove,” which is a recognizable symbol for the Holy Spirit among many Christian denominations. The definite article replaces the indefinite one to establish that “the holy dove” is both singular and significant, unlike “a murmuring dove,” which is less rigid in its symbolic implication. Though “a murmuring dove” could refer to the Holy Spirit, it could also be a bird without substantial significance besides simply complementing the natural imagery of the poem, which the speaker associates with God (2).

One of Wilde’s more significant revisions transforms “Fruit-laden vines dear memories of thee bring” to “Wind-shaken reeds dear memories of Thee bring” in the fifth line. Both the “Fruit-laden vines” and “Wind-shaken reeds” allude to Christ’s teachings regarding the importance of faithfulness. In John 15:1-7, Christ says, “I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit.” Christ describes that those who are faithful to him, the “vine,” will be as “branches” that “bringeth forth much fruit”; in other words, those who are loyal to their belief in God will prosper. Similarly, “[w]ind-shaken reeds” invoke Luke 7, when Christ praises John the Baptist as a prophet of unwavering faith. In Luke 7:24-26, Christ asserts that the crowd who had gone “out into the wilderness” to see John did not go to see “A reed shaken by the wind”—a vulnerable man easily swayed or “carried about with every wind of doctrine” (Ephesians 4:14)—but a man of conviction, “strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 2:1). Both allusions utilize biblical metaphors to demonstrate that memories of Christ’s teachings strengthen the speaker’s faithfulness more than threats of a violent reckoning. Thus, Wilde’s reasoning for the revision is relatively unclear—especially considering that later versions of the sonnet return to variations of the “vines” (5).

Perhaps Wilde was simply unsatisfied with the line and thus continually modified it. Or maybe Wilde sought to express how memories of Christ’s teachings can strengthen faithfulness in the face of doubt or wavering—an objective consistent with that of the *Lyra Hibernica Sacra* collection. In his preface, MacIlwaine condemns “the jarring of religious opinion,” which he deems “too long proved so fruitful a source of sorrow and suffering to Ireland.” MacIlwaine thus endeavored to unite Christian poets through the “one central point towards which all who really deserve the Christian name are ever found to turn…acknowledgment of Him” (MacIlwaine V). By including the “wind-shaken reeds,” Wilde thus underscored the importance of remaining steadfast to Christ by resisting being “carried about with every wind of doctrine” (Ephesians 4:14), supporting MacIlwaine’s overall intention for the collection.

Wilde may have also had personal reasons for revising the fifth line. His relationships with Protestantism and Catholicism remained unstable for most of his life. Moreover, he was unsettled by doctrines such as Judgment Day. In a March 1877 letter to William Ward, Wilde writes: “I have dreams of a visit to Newman, of the holy sacrament in a new Church, and of a quiet and peace afterwards in my soul. I need not say, though, that I shift with every breath of thought and am weaker and more self-deceiving than ever” (Wilde, *Complete Letters* 39). Though seemingly drawn to certain aspects of Christianity, such as Christ’s teachings of mercy and the promise of salvation, Wilde’s faith remained somewhat wavering. When “Nay, come not thus” was written and published, Wilde perhaps identified with the metaphor of the “wind-shaken reed” (5). His self-critical proclamation of weakness and self-deception regarding his religious conviction implies that the sonnet may have been inspired, at least partially, by Wilde’s own remembrance of Christ’s teachings about the importance of faith in the face of doubt.

The final edits to the *Lyra Hibernica Sacra* version of Wilde’s “Dies Irae” sonnet occur in the last stanza, where Wilde revises “And the woods echo to the reaper’s song” to “And the fields echo to the reapers’ song” (14). By replacing “the woods” with “the fields,” Wilde clarifies his allusion to biblical representations of Judgment Day, specifically those in Joel 3 and Matthew 13, which were discussed previously in regard to the *Good Words* manuscript. In Matthew 13, Christ states, “The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one” (Matthew 13:38). According to this parable, the world is a “field” filled with “seed[s],” and the “good seed[s]” represent those faithful to God, while the weeds, or “tares,” represent those who are evil or unrepentant. The “harvest” designates the end of the world when God will return to judge humanity, and his angels are “reapers” who will come to cast the wicked “into a furnace of fire,” expelling them from his kingdom (Matthew 13:39-43). By integrating the word “field[s],” Wilde thus creates a specific, palpable allusion to the Book of Matthew. Likewise, by revising “reaper’s” to “reapers’,” he shifts from the singular to the plural to more accurately reflect God’s angels, which are not single but numerous. Wilde’s implementation of language drawn directly from Matthew 13 establishes the crucial religious context for a Christian collection such as the *Lyra Hibernica Sacra*. Such recontextualization was also probably necessary for readers to interpret the poem as a rejoinder to Judgment Day as Wilde intended, given the removal of the original title referencing the “Dies Irae.”

Wilde’s “Dies Irae” sonnet ultimately found success in 1878 with the *Lyra Hibernica Sacra*, which must have sold well because a second, larger edition including 252 works by ninety-one authors was published a year later. Wilde would likely have been pleased with the collection’s success, as it fulfilled his primary objective since submitting his manuscript to *Good Words*. However, the version of Wilde’s “Dies Irae” sonnet—“Nay, come not thus”—would not be the final iteration of the piece. He would revise it for his own poetry collection, *Poems*, twice more in 1881 and 1882. Perhaps he was personally unsatisfied with the sonnet, which he had seemingly tailored first to appeal to the Protestant interests of Reverend Donald Macleod and second to adhere to the ecumenical objectives of Reverend William MacIlwaine. The final revision of the title of the “Dies Irae” sonnet to “Sonnet. On Hearing the ‘Dies Iræ’ Sung in the Sistine Chapel” for Wilde’s *Poems* affirms that he crafted the first two iterations of the title to the editors of *Good Words* and *Lyra Hibernica Sacra*.

A second manuscript of the “Dies Irae” poem, seemingly crafted following the *Lyra Hibernica Sacra* publication and before *Poems* (1881), exists under the present title “Sonnet. On Hearing the ‘Dies Iræ’ Sung in the Sistine Chapel” (Appendix C). Though this second manuscript is undated, the edits, including those to the title, the revision of “Wind-shaken reeds” to “The empurpled vines,” and “reapers’” to “gleaners”—all of which remain consistent with the version in Wilde’s *Poems* (1881)—indicate that it was likely written sometime between 1878 and 1881. The catalog of the Jeremy Mason Collection, which currently holds the manuscript, also dates it after the version sent to *Good Words*. This manuscript raises similar questions regarding the location cited in its title. However, its location, the Sistine Chapel, is perhaps more probable than the location of the first manuscript, the Magdalen Chapel. Though it is possible, as previously discussed, that Wilde heard Mozart’s “Dies Irae” sung at Magdalen Chapel, there is no record of the performance. Furthermore, the possibility of Wilde hearing the “Dies Irae” at what is an Anglican Church remains far slighter than the possibility of his hearing it at the Sistine Chapel, a Roman Catholic Church, where it would likely be played often for Requiem Mass.

Considering that Wilde traveled to Rome just a few months before he sent his first “Dies Irae” manuscript to Macleod and that the poem that accompanied the original “Dies Irae” manuscript, “Easter Day,” was seemingly inspired by that very trip, it is likely that the original inspiration for the “Dies Irae” sonnet was Wilde’s experience in Rome. Not only was Wilde very interested in Roman Catholicism when the sonnet was written and edited, but the final three iterations also indicate the “Sistine Chapel” as their source location. Though the first manuscript was signed “Magdalen College, Oxford,” the accompanying one of “Easter Day” was signed “Rome” in a script almost identical to that of the second manuscript, which contains the postscript “Rome.” Given that these sonnets were likely written around the same time and inspired by similar religious interests, it is probable that the “Dies Irae” sonnet and the “Easter Day” sonnet were both inspired by, if not written during, Wilde’s April 1877 trip to Rome.

Despite the similarities between the second “Dies Irae” manuscript, “Sonnet. On Hearing the ‘Dies Irae’ Sung in the Sistine Chapel,” and the final published versions, the text also demonstrates slight edits and variations that distinguish it from both the earlier and later versions. The second manuscript’s first distinguishing characteristic is its replacement of “white lilies” with “field lilies” (1). A potential explanation for this revision is that Wilde, liberated from the obligations of writing for a religious publication, simply wanted to rework the diction in the poem to achieve a more desirable sound. The word “field” creates consonance with the second line of the poem, which he edited to contain many “d” sounds: “Sad olive-gardens, or the holy dove” became “Dark olive-woods, or silver-breasted dove” (2). Despite preserving, to some extent, the religious symbolism of the “dove,” Wilde no longer needed to emphasize that the “dove” was “holy.” He thus removed the adjective to enhance the rhythm of the line by highlighting the repetition of the “d” sounds.

Though Wilde removed words to improve the overall sound of the second manuscript, he reincorporated many of them in other parts of the sonnet, suggesting that he maintained some preoccupation with preserving the religious imagery of earlier iterations. For instance, in the eleventh line, Wilde substituted “fields” with “trees,” likely to create assonance with the long “e” sound of “leaves,” “trees,” and “glean” (11). However, he reincorporated the imagery of the “field[s]” by revising the first line from “white lilies in the spring” to “field lilies in the spring” (1), signifying his intention to preserve the biblical allusion he previously integrated by altering “And the woods echo to the reaper’s song” to “And the fields echo to the reapers’ song” in the *Lyra Hibernica Sacra* version (11). Similarly, by revising “Sad olive-gardens” to “Dark olive-woods” in the second line, Wilde retained the imagery of “woods” he included in the first manuscript, which contained the line “And the woods echo to the reaper’s song” (11). Wilde’s reinstitution of the title as “Sonnet. On Hearing the ‘Dies Irae’ Sung in the Sistine Chapel” corroborates that, despite his liberation from the religious obligations of publications like *Good Words* and the *Lyra Hibernica Sacra*, he still endeavored not only to maintain some of the original Christian imagery but also to introduce his own, perhaps more overtly Catholic, religious affiliations.

Wilde also revisited the fifth line, revising “Wind-shaken reeds dear memories of Thee bring” to “The empurpled vines dear memories of Thee bring.” He thus returned to an iteration of the “fruit-laden vines” of the first manuscript, reinstituting the earlier biblical allusion to John 15 while also refining the modifying adjective “fruit-laden” to “empurpled” (5). Both renditions—“fruit-laden” and “empurpled”—signify the prosperity achieved through faithfulness to God, conveyed by Christ’s metaphor of the vine in John 15. “[E]mpurpled vines,” however, connote ripening, while “fruit-laden vines” do not. The prefix “em” implies transformation or intensification, suggesting a growth into fruition. “[E]mpurpled” therefore insinuates the realization—or ripening—of a prosperous life with God, foreshadowing the final line of the sonnet, which indicates the speaker’s readiness to be “harvest[ed]” by God (Matthew 13:39) or taken to God’s “kingdom” (Matthew 13:43). Wilde’s revision thus renders the adjective more semantically consistent with the rest of the sonnet. Additionally, the richer adjective “empurpled” corresponds to the more sensual, luxurious diction of many of Wilde’s other poems at the time, such as “Easter Day,” which would appear just after “Sonnet. On Hearing the ‘Dies Iræ’ Sung in the Sistine Chapel” in *Poems* (1881), despite Wilde’s initial request that the two not be published together in *Good Words* because of their similarity in “rhyme” (Wilde, letter to Donald Macleod, July 1877). Such sensuous language, even within a religious poem, would have likely been unwelcome in publications such as *Good Words* or *Lyra Hibernica Sacra* but preferred by Wilde for his own collection.

In the final stanza of the second manuscript, Wilde replaced “reapers’ song” with “gleaners song”—another revision likely motivated by his no longer needing to include explicit biblical allusions, as he might have previously for religious publications (14). To add “gleaners,” Wilde removed a direct reference to Matthew 13, in which angels are described as “reapers.” His reintroduction of the title, however, which contextualizes the poem as a response to the “Dies Irae,” compensates for the removal, enabling Wilde to modify the narrative of Judgment Day to better align with the speaker’s intentions while maintaining the agrarian imagery characteristic of the poem. “Gleaners” has an agricultural connotation, referring to someone who picks up grain in the field left by harvesters. Though “glean[ing]” is found in the Bible, it is not associated with death or Judgment Day but as a method of aiding the poor. For instance, in Leviticus 19:9 God instructs that when wheat and barley fields are ready to be harvested, some grain should be allowed to drop so that the “poor and the foreigner” can gather what they need for provision.

By replacing “reapers” with “gleaners,” Wilde thus reframed the angels as gentle beneficiaries who would come to gather God’s children as those who gather crops ready for harvest. The connotation of the “gleaner” therefore is far less violent than that of the “reaper,” whose responsibility is defined in the Bible as delivering the “wicked” into a “furnace of fire” (Matthew 13:39-43). Accordingly, the metaphor of “glean[ing],” which alludes to God’s generosity instead of his wrath, is representative of the speaker’s primary objective in the sonnet—to appeal to God for teachings of mercy and salvation rather than threats of hellfire or destruction. Through these slight modifications in diction, Wilde thus reframes Judgment Day as the fruition of lifelong faithfulness to God rather than a violent reckoning of sin.

As previously discussed, most of the revisions made in the second manuscript, including the title, correspond to the edition published in Wilde’s first collection of poetry, which was printed in June 1881, just two years after Wilde moved to London. In May 1881, Wilde wrote to the publisher David Bogue, explaining that he was “anxious to publish a volume of poems immediately, and should like to enter into a treaty with your house about it…Possibly my name requires no introduction” (Wilde, *Complete Letters* 110). At the time, Wilde had emerged as a preeminent figure in the Aesthetic Movement, which gained public recognition largely due to the success of Gilbert & Sullivan’s successful comic opera *Patience*. After years of appealing to editors, particularly in London, he likely concluded that his newfound celebrity status and the successful publication of poems such as the “Dies Irae” sonnet finally provided him the platform to publish his poetry on his own terms—free from the jurisdiction of editors like Macleod.

Despite his increased recognition as a public figure, Wilde’s *Poems* was printed at his own expense and received predominantly unfavorable reviews in Britain. Such critical responses ranged from assertions that Wilde’s work was too derivative to condemnations of its overt sensuality. Perhaps the most relevant critical response to Wilde’s sonnet was by Oscar Browning, whom Wilde specifically asked to review his collection. Though considerably less disparaging than other reviewers, Browning detected a distinctive feature of *Poems*—its reflection of the poet’s inner religious turmoil. In his review for the *Academy*, Browning writes: “Roman Catholic ritual, stern Puritanism, parched Greek islands, cool English lanes and streams, Paganism and Christianity...receive in turn the same passionate devotion” (85). Many of Wilde’s close acquaintances at the time would likely agree with his assessment. Wilde’s former classics tutor, John Pentland Mahaffy, for instance, was familiar with Wilde’s fascination with Rome and resolved to deter Wilde from his Catholic interests in favor of paganism. After convincing Wilde to visit Greece instead of Rome, he boasted in a letter to his wife: “We have taken Oscar Wilde with us, who has of course come round under the influence of the moment from Popery to Paganism” (Stanford and McDowell 41). Mahaffy likely would have rejoiced in knowing that Wilde remained allured by paganism even during his 1877 trip to Rome, where he was delighted to see ancient Greek statues in the Vatican Museums (Vernier 41).

Mahaffy, however, was but one important agent contributing to Wilde’s ongoing inner religious conflict. Wilde’s father, a firm Protestant, and his friend David Hunter Blair, one of many Catholic converts at Oxford, were two other competing voices that complicated Wilde’s contemplation of his faith. In a letter to Hunter Blair, Wilde revealed that he “incurred his father’s grave displeasure by certain leanings he showed towards the Catholic Church,” suggesting that he might face disinheritance should he formally convert (Stern 87). Despite his knowledge of these threats, Hunter Blair condemned Wilde for his failure to choose between Catholicism and Protestantism. In a letter dated June 1, 1877—just one month before Wilde submitted his manuscripts to *Good Words*—Hunter Blair wrote: “You must be a Catholic or nothing your choice is between God and the devil neither more nor less. How can you hesitate?” The Catholic sentiments Wilde expressed in many of his poems at the time, including the “Dies Irae” sonnet, were perhaps considered blasphemous—or at least irreverent—by Hunter Blair, who concluded his letter by stating, “Do not send me your sonnets. I do not care to see them” (Hunter-Blair, letter to Oscar Wilde, 1 June 1877). Weeks before his death, in an interview granted to John Clifford Millage, Paris Correspondent of the *Daily Chronicle*, Wilde would blame what Hunter Blair deemed his “weakness and want of principle” on his father: “Much of my moral obliquity is due to the fact that my father would not allow me to become a Catholic…The artistic side of the Church would have cured my degeneracies. I intend to be received before long” (Burke).

Though Wilde lacked the financial backing to convert to Catholicism against his father’s wishes, he felt alienated by the rational approach of the Protestant Church to the Bible and was drawn to the Catholic experience of faith as more of an emotional experience. His “Dies Irae” sonnet is perhaps an example of Wilde’s rejection of the literal, biblical interpretation of Judgment Day in favor of experiencing faith as a subjective, emotional interaction with nature and beauty. In a March 1877 letter, Wilde encouraged William Ward, his Protestant peer, to emotionally surrender to the spirit of Catholicism while in Rome: “Do be touched by it, feel the awful fascination of the Church, its extreme beauty and sentiment, and let every part of your nature have play and room” (Wilde, *Complete Letters* 39). Wilde’s advice embodies his own decadent approach to religion—an approach that was perhaps analogous to his approach to art, likely because he saw the two as inextricable. Walter Pater’s *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873), which Wilde coined his “golden book” (Ellmann 47), famously urges readers to grasp every experience they encounter: “Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself, is the end. A counted number of pulses only is given to us of a variegated, dramatic life. How may we see in them all that is to be seen in them by the finest senses?” (Pater 210). The Catholic Church similarly emphasizes engaging the senses to engage the spirit. The sacraments are “the channels through which we receive God's grace”; they employ the senses to bridge the divide between the visible and invisible worlds (Whelan 22). As a poet and aesthete, Wilde was likely allured by the mysticism and decadence of the Roman Catholic Church, and his fascination became the inspiration for multiple poems in the “Rosa Mystica” chapter of *Poems*.

Wilde immediately established his interest in Catholicism as the inspirational framework for the “Rosa Mystica” section of *Poems* through its title, which translates from Latin to “Mystical Rose”—a poetic name used in Catholic hymns and prayers for the Virgin Mary. Accompanied by poems like “San Miniato,” an invocation to the Virgin Mary, and “Rome Unvisited,” a lamentation of Wilde's failed 1876 “pilgrimage” to “Holy Rome” (Wilde, *Complete Letters* 32), Wilde’s “Dies Irae” sonnet seems to achieve its most authentic form in the “Rosa Mystica” section (Appendix D). Though it remains uncertain whether Wilde heard the “Dies Irae” sung in Rome or elsewhere, the date of the first known manuscript, its ostensibly Catholic inspiration, and its ultimate belonging to a chapter of overtly religious poems that correlate to Wilde’s trips to Italy suggest that the “Dies Irae” sonnet was likely inspired by Wilde’s visit to Rome and his related engagement with Roman Catholicism. Wilde’s choice of the Sistine Chapel as the source location for both self-published versions of the poem—the final ones in print—corroborates that he likely altered earlier versions to appeal to publishers, thus undermining his own Catholic interests. Accordingly, the final versions of the sonnet probably represent Wilde’s artistic vision for the piece as it belongs to his larger body of work. The postscript “Rome,” which was added to the second manuscript, was possibly removed from the version in *Poems* (1881) because the sonnet’s revised title and its placement in a larger collection primarily dedicated to Wilde’s trip to Italy provided sufficient contextualization.

In the 1881 edition of *Poems*, Wilde consolidates and refines his revisions from earlier iterations of the sonnet. By shifting from “Nay, come not thus: field lilies in the spring” to “Nay, Lord, not thus! white lilies in the spring,” he opens with a much clearer invocation, immediately establishing the sonnet as an appeal to God (1). Paired with an exclamation mark, which replaces the earlier colon, Wilde’s invocation conveys a greater depth of emotion than the previous versions and constructs a personal connection between the speaker and the “Lord.” His increased specificity in the first line reinforces the religious imagery throughout the poem and strengthens his emotional plea in response to the “Dies Irae.”

Wilde also retracted several of the revisions he made to the second manuscript, likely to hone the religious symbolism in the sonnet. He returned from the “field lilies” of the second manuscript to the original “white lilies,” channeling the symbolic significance of the Easter lily, which is mentioned multiple times in the Bible to symbolize purity, rebirth, and new beginnings (1). The white Easter lily, associated with the resurrection of Jesus Christ, often represents the promise of eternal life for followers of Christ. By invoking this symbol, Wilde thus counters the “terrors of red-flame and thundering” of Judgment Day with the promise of hope and salvation (4). God’s graciousness, Wilde underscores, is a greater motivation for faithfulness than his wrath.

Wilde, however, did not completely remove “field[s]” from the sonnet but instead restored the image to its earlier location in the *Lyra Hibernica Sacra* version—the eleventh line—probably to conserve the religious symbolism of both the “white lilies” and the “fields.” To reintroduce “fields” in the eleventh line, Wilde reversed his earlier edit in the second manuscript, where he had changed “fields” to “trees,” and thus created assonance in “leaves” and “gleaner’s.” By reversing many of these revisions, he sacrificed some of the sonic enhancements prioritized in the second manuscript to reemphasize religious symbolism in the first edition of *Poems* (1881). Nonetheless, Wilde refined other parts of the sonnet to enhance its overall sound while foregrounding religious imagery. For instance, in the second line, he combined “Sad olive-gardens,” from the *Lyra Hibernica Sacra* version, with “Dark olive-woods,” from the second manuscript, to formulate “Sad olive-groves” for the final iterations of the sonnet in the 1881 and 1882 volumes of *Poems.* These variations of the olive tree, considering their pairing with the “silver-breasted dove,” allude to Genesis 8:11, in which Noah releases a dove hoping it will find land, and the dove returns with an olive branch in its beak. In Christianity, the olive branch is frequently interpreted as a symbol of peace, representing the end of God’s judgment and the beginning of his enduring love, mercy, and faithfulness to his people. The symbol of the olive tree, therefore, is consistent with the speaker’s rejection of God’s wrath and appeal for his compassion. Given that all iterations retain the biblical significance of the olive tree, it is likely that Wilde chose the final version for its poetic sound; the “s” and “d” sounds of the adjective “sad” create consonance with the “silver-breasted dove.”

Despite the critical reviews Wilde received for his 1881 editions of *Poems*, he continued to print successive editions in 1882. The fifth edition of *Poems* (1882), like its predecessors, was published by David Bogue at Wilde’s own cost. Only 750 copies were initially printed on commission for David Bogue in June 1881, and those 750 copies were divided into three editions so that the first 250 copies were the first edition, the next 250 were second, and the last 250 were third, with the only differences between them being the title pages and covers. The reasoning behind creating multiple editions was likely strategic, given that the text itself remained consistent. By emphasizing the production of numerous editions, Wilde presumably aimed to cultivate the impression of success or high demand, hoping to increase his prestige. Though he received mixed responses from British critics, Wilde’s plan was ultimately somewhat of a triumph. Publicity—good or bad, it seemed—ensured the first 750 copies of the collection were sold, and plans for a new printing of 500 more were made soon after, in January 1882. Half of these copies became the fourth edition of *Poems*, and the remainder became the fifth. In this next wave of publication, Wilde seized the opportunity to make changes to the text itself, apparently unsatisfied with slight details in some of the poems, including the “Dies Irae” sonnet (Appendix E).

Wilde’s “Dies Irae” sonnet underwent just one revision in its final iteration: “The empurpled vines” in *Poems* (1881) became “The hillside vines” in *Poems* (1882). By the time Wilde completed the final version, the fifth line would be the most edited in the entire sonnet. Undergoing a total of four revisions, it appeared differently in every version except for the second manuscript and the 1881 editions of *Poems*: in both of these versions, it appeared as “The empurpled vines.” The line is not necessarily a standout in the sonnet; it seems purely expositional in purpose, occurring just before the volta. It appears unusual, then, that Wilde would fixate on it. Yet, it was not untypical for Wilde to be obsessively meticulous in his editing practices. When preparing his first collection of *Poems*, he complained, “I was working on the proof of one of my poems all morning and took out a comma…In the afternoon—well, I put it back again” (Sturgis 335). If Wilde could spend hours obsessing over a single comma, then it is perhaps unsurprising that he would do the same for a single adjective in a line he found unsatisfactory.

Yet, Wilde’s precise reasoning behind the final edit to “hillside vines” is ambiguous. One potential reason may be related to the poem’s tone. Though many of Wilde’s poems contain sensuous language, “empurpled” is perhaps too rich or sensual to match the religious tone of the rest of the poem. “Hillside,” despite seeming simplistic or even banal for a Wilde poem, has a more natural connotation consistent with the overall tone of the sonnet. Another possible motivation for the revision may have been to improve the sound of the line, which Wilde continuously revised throughout the various editions of the poem. Because Wilde’s “Dies Irae” sonnet is a Petrarchan sonnet, it is written in iambic pentameter. Therefore, the word “empurpled” renders the fifth line hypermetric, containing twelve syllables instead of ten. Though Wilde does not necessarily adhere to the ten-syllable rule throughout the sonnet, he does limit himself to eleven syllables at most in the rest of the lines. “Hillside,” for instance, still leaves the fifth line with eleven syllables instead of ten, but it sounds much more regular than “empurpled,” which disrupts the overall rhythm of the sonnet.

Wilde’s revisions across each version of his “Dies Irae” sonnet provide critical insight into the writer’s practices, demonstrating his capacity to leverage his own religious and artistic interests with his ambitions as a young poet attempting to obtain publication in England. The title and the fifth line, which receive the most revisions in the sonnet—changing four times across the five versions—manifest the instability of Wilde’s work and his ability to repeatedly edit and re-edit it to not only reflect his own aesthetic vision but also to appeal to editors of popular publications. When examined in conjunction with his pattern of publication, Wilde’s revisions convey his increased confidence to write according to his own artistic—and, accordingly, religious—interests. Though the “Dies Irae” sonnet, as a rejoinder to Judgment Day, is inherently Christian, the earlier iterations, sent to Reverend Donald Macleod of *Good Words*, a Protestant publication, and Reverend William MacIlwaine of the *Lyra Hibernica Sacra*, a non-denominational collection, illustrate Wilde’s willingness to undermine his Catholic sentiment to attain prominence as a poet. Later versions of the sonnet, however, are more overtly Catholic. Considering Wilde’s contemplation of his religion at the time and their final position in his own collection, *Poems*, these later versions are, perhaps, more candid representations of his original intentions for the piece. Ultimately, Wilde’s meticulous editing across each version of the “Dies Irae” sonnet reveals a poet who was never fully satisfied and whose dynamic approach rendered him capable of refining his poems to effectively reflect his evolving intentions—whether they be achieving publication in a particular collection or representing his own artistic vision.

**Appendices**

**Appendix A**

Sonnet

(Written after Hearing Mozart’s “Dies Irae” Sung in Magdalen Chapel.)

Nay, come not thus: white lilies in the spring,

Sad olive-gardens, or a murmuring Dove,

Teach me more clearly of thy life and love

Than terrors of red-flame and thundering;

Fruit-laden vines dear memories of thee bring;

A bird at evening flying to its nest

Tells me of One who had no place of rest;

I think it is of thee the sparrows sing.

Come rather on some autumn afternoon

When red and brown are burnished on the leaves,

And the woods echo to the reaper’s song:

Come when the splendid fullness of the moon

Looks down upon the rows of golden sheaves

And reap thy Harvest; we have waited long.

Oscar Wilde.

Magdalen College

Oxford.

**Appendix B**

Nay, come not thus

Nay, come not thus: white lilies in the spring,

Sad olive-gardens, or the holy dove,

Teach me more clearly of Thy life and love

Than terrors of red-flame and thundering;

Wind-shaken reeds dear memories of Thee bring;

A bird at evening flying to its nest

Tells me of One who had no place of rest;

I think it is of Thee the sparrows sing.

Come rather on some autumn afternoon,

When red and brown are burnished on the leaves,

And the fields echo to the reapers’ song.

Come when the splendid fullness of the moon

Looks down upon the rows of golden sheaves

And reap Thy harvest; we have waited long.

Oscar Wilde.

**Appendix C**

Sonnet. On Hearing the “Dies Irae” Sung in the Sistine Chapel.

Nay, come not thus: ~~white~~ /field\ lilies in the spring,

Dark olive-woods, or silver-breasted dove,

Teach me more clearly of Thy life and love

Than terrors of red-flame and thundering.

The empurpled vines dear memories of Thee bring;

A bird at evening flying to its nest

Tells me of One who had no place of rest;

I think it is of Thee the sparrows sing.

Come rather on some autumn afternoon

When red and brown are burnished on the leaves,

And the ~~field~~ /trees\ echo ~~to~~ /with\ the gleaners song:

Come when the splendid fullness of the moon

Looks down upon the rows of golden sheaves

And reap ~~t~~/T\hy harvest: we have waited long.

Rome Oscar Wilde.

**Appendix D**

Sonnet.

On Hearing the Dies Iræ Sung in the Sistine Chapel.

Nay, Lord, not thus! white lilies in the spring,

Sad olive-groves, or silver-breasted dove,

Teach me more clearly of Thy life and love

Than terrors of red-flame and thundering.

The empurpled vines dear memories of Thee bring:

A bird at evening flying to its nest,

Tells me of One who had no place of rest:

I think it is of Thee the sparrows sing.

Come rather on some autumn afternoon,

When red and brown are burnished on the leaves,

And the fields echo to the gleaner’s song,

Come when the splendid fulness of the moon

Looks down upon the rows of golden sheaves,

And reap Thy harvest: we have waited long.

Oscar Wilde.

**Appendix E**

Sonnet.

On Hearing the Dies Iræ Sung in the Sistine Chapel.

Nay, Lord, not thus! white lilies in the spring,

Sad olive-groves, or silver-breasted dove,

Teach me more clearly of Thy life and love

Than terrors of red-flame and thundering.

The hillside vines dear memories of Thee bring:

A bird at evening flying to its nest,

Tells me of One who had no place of rest:

I think it is of Thee the sparrows sing.

Come rather on some autumn afternoon,

When red and brown are burnished on the leaves,

And the fields echo to the gleaner’s song,

Come when the splendid fulness of the moon

Looks down upon the rows of golden sheaves,

And reap Thy harvest: we have waited long.

Oscar Wilde.

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