**Ever Decreasing Circles:**

**The Aesthete's Idealism, Self-Realization and Mortality**

**in the Fiction of Wilde and Hardy**

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Whilst Oscar Wilde and Thomas Hardy reached the literary zeniths of their careers at almost exactly the same time, and were both similarly fêted as great literary men of letters by fashionable London society, they moved in different circles.  Indeed, on first glance, the prose of Wilde and Hardy would appear to have little in common. Wilde’s aestheticism and social satire, modelled as it was on the rhetorical traditions of Swift, Pope and Moliere appears to the casual critic worlds away from the austere, pessimistic, stoically late-Victorian tragedies of Thomas Hardy. Yet, their literary output does exhibit certain similarities, and, in thematic terms, both writers address ideas which, although expressed differently, actually complement each other dyadically. Wilde’s *A Picture of Dorian Gray* and Hardy`s *The Well Beloved* focus on the theme of the self-obsessed aesthete, and the long-term consequences that one incurs when striving after an idea. Hardy’s *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Earnest* address the act of falling in love in terms of how this process ultimately engenders self-realization. Finally, Wilde in *Salome* and Hardy in *The Return of the Native* dissect the idea of death as a narrative event. In this way, both writers explore fundamental elements of the human experience in terms of its ever-decreasing circular condition, from aestheticism to self-realization, and finally, mortality and death.  Thus whilst Hardy and Wilde moved in different literary circles, their narrative themes can be understood as having addressed the human condition in a complimentary fashion.