In “Vacation Cruises; or, The Homoerotics of Orientalism” (1995), Joseph A. Boone claims that “[p]erhaps nowhere else are the sexual politics of colonial narrative so explicitly thematized as in the voyages to the Near East recorded or imagined by Western men” (89). Although the heterosexual framework of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) avoids all but the most evasive mention of specifically homosexual practices, Boone finds Said’s analysis widely applicable to authors concerned with elaborating homoerotic experience through the use of the topography and tropology, as well as the bodies and apparel, of the East. For Boone, the articulation of Western homosexual identity colludes with the enterprise of colonial arrogation so that, in effect, one oppressed group attains coherence by abjecting another.

However, both André Gide, whom Boone discusses, and Oscar Wilde, whom he mentions briefly, render homosexual identity radically equivocal through recourse to the East. Gide’s 1902 *The Immoralist* [*L’immoraliste*] and Wilde’s 1891 *The Picture of Dorian Gray* position male homosexual experience as the site of the loss of control. Homosexuality remains an unanswered question, rather than a triumphant identity, a love finally daring to speak its name. That these foundational modernist texts use the East as an analytic of critique should lead us to complicate any direct mapping of Western male homosexual subjectivity onto the master narratives of colonial expansion and orientalizing desire.

Through close readings of *The Immoralist* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* that are attentive to the narrative and aesthetic dynamics of the novels, as well as to the distinction between the homoerotically interested Western male protagonist and the homoerotically invested Western male author, this essay articulates a different way of relating postcolonial theory to queer theory, one that forges equivalences between
two critical reading practices, as well as between two sets of political concerns. Implicit in the approach is respect for the difficulties of modernist texts, complexities that we should connect to socio-historical contexts—including imperialism, colonialism, and emergent homosexual identity—but that cannot be flattened to those contexts. The first half of the essay attends to Gide; the second, to Wilde. Because the interpretation of *The Immoralist* serves to illuminate more subtle correspondences in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the discussions appear in reverse chronological order, albeit with recognition of Wilde’s influence on Gide. I should make clear that the use of the Orient to critique the West constitutes a special form of orientalism, one that again puts the Orient in a supporting role; such deployment does not, however, render these novels grossly equivalent to stories aggrandizing Occidental subjectivity at the expense of the East.¹ This essay attempts to demonstrate the political importance of engaging postcolonial and queer theories in critical dialogue, thus continuing the interpretive work that Boone and others have pioneered.

**Triple Dealing**

Boone reads *The Immoralist* as a narrative exemplifying how “the possibility of sexual contact with and between men underwrites and at times even explains the historical appeal of orientalism as an occidental mode of male perception, appropriation, and control” (90). The sexual awakening of the protagonist, Michel, “depends on his refusal to see the actual foreign others who embody his desire as anything but objects . . . anonymous, available bodies, the means to his awakening, never subjects of their own stories or desires” (101). Boone’s reading of Michel’s character is astute, but he does not sufficiently acknowledge the way in which the narrative carefully circumscribes Michel. The novel opens space for analyzing its protagonist by triply mediating Michel’s reception: at first remove, by Michel himself, who rehearses his story to friends he has summoned after its events take place, engaging in a limited measure of self-critique; at second remove, by the puzzled friends, who serve as chagrined stand-ins for the reader; and at third remove, by the authorial voice, who not only puts Michel at a critical distance in the preface, but also, throughout the narrative, subtly has the protagonist undermine himself through his own observations. Indeed, the words, *triple commerce* (147) [“triple-dealing” (134)], appear in an episode in which Michel is the dupe.² By placing Michel in a frame within a frame that is again wrapped within a frame, the novel provides a multiple distantiﬁcation of perspective from which to assess his statements and actions, at the same time disallowing the collapse of the protagonist into the author. This accordion-like mediation, as we will see, runs directly counter to Michel’s avowals of attaining an immediate, naked relation to reality.

Boone, considering a number of Western male writers who traveled to North Africa, including Gide, concludes that “the story of many Western men’s encounters