

# Hotel Melodrama in E.M. Forster's "The Story of a Panic" and "The Story of the Siren"

Athanasios Dimakis

National and Kapodistrian University of Athens

"But this assumption of melodrama  
is produced by the hotel itself"  
(Field Levander and Pratt Guterl 2015, 89)

## Abstract

Ostensibly unconnected and critically underexplored, E.M. Forster's hotel-related stories "The Story of a Panic" (1904) and "The Story of the Siren" (1920) seem to resonate with genuine hotel-generated melodrama(s). Both short stories were inspired by Forster's respective hotel sojourns in Ravello and what reads as a synthetic amalgam of Palermo and Capri. They both belong to Forster's Italian hotel literature and point to the author's consistent hotel literariness. The geographical proximity of these (Tyrrhenian) hotel stories only accentuates the irony of the overarching tautological formula. The essay traces the new modes of being that Forster's male protagonists dare to experience maintaining that they point to Forster's modernist dialectics with the already established thread of literary melodrama. Viewing these stories through the lens of melodrama – manifested in the avant-garde sentimentality, queer ostentation, exaggeration, flamboyance, and theatricality of their protagonists – the essay serves to highlight their emotive potential culminating in the unsettling of stereotypes. In a decidedly modernist turn, both "The Story of a Panic" and "The Story of the Siren" open up the possibility for uncharted territories and new modes of being, while triggering a backward dialectical movement that brings forth the forlorn legacy of melodrama as per Peter Brooks' formulation. Thus, they generate genuine hotel melodrama.

**Keywords:** E.M. Forster, literary hotels, melodrama, Queer Modernism, short stories

## 1. Introduction: Hotel Literature and the Melodrama of Modernism

A seemingly unrelated epigram constitutes this essay's starting point. Discussing the dramatic extensions of Hollywoodian hotel scenes, in the context of their literary and cultural genealogy of hotel life entitled *Hotel Life: The Story of a Place Where Anything Can Happen*, Caroline Field Levander and Matthew Pratt Guterl point to "the enduring feature of the hotel" as a site for "dramatic endings" due to its polyvalence (2015, 89). It is worth quoting from this critique of hotels as paradigmatic sites for the unfolding of such literary and cinematic melodrama(s) before the essay expands on the relevance and applicability of these observations to E.M. Forster's Tyrrhenian hotel stories, and his hotel-related literature in general:

[T]his assumption of melodrama is produced by the hotel itself and is an aftereffect of the corporate conceit that, in life and in death, every guest has a story to tell. A hotel is, we are implicitly told, good for an ending as well as for a new beginning. (Levander and Guterl 2015, 89)

Drawing on this conceptualization of hotel life,<sup>1</sup> my essay maintains that the critically underexplored hotel settings of Forster's short stories introduce and showcase the melodramatic potential of hotel spaces, and more specifically the literary trope of hotel death. While Forster invariably posits the cultural construct of the hotel as a space for the unfolding of genuine melodramas that reshape experience or transform the banality of the quotidian through the transcendental power of escape and/or death, his literary hotels also present readers with the view of the hotel as a convergence of opposites depicting the normalising potential of hotel culture and the covert disciplining that it often imposes on its sexually liberated, socially inept, or resistant residents.

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<sup>1</sup> In their sustained discussion of the discontents of literary hotels, Levander and Guterl offer a prompt overview of the trope of hotel melodrama. However, they offer no exploration of Forster's hotel literature and its revisiting of the established pattern of continental melodrama: "The idea that the hotel could serve as the backdrop for a tragic farce, or for a world-gone-mad storyline, has a long history. *Hotel Topsy-Turvy*, a turn-of-the-century play, chronicles the experiences of guests in a building managed a bit haphazardly by a circus troupe. A mix of vaudeville and melodrama, it foreshadowed the campy visions of the "hotel hell" of the contemporary moment" (2015, 173).

The depiction of Forster's hotels seems to negotiate a binary between enfranchisement and radical disenfranchisement. "Surrounded by the plastic, unreal ethos of the hotel" (Levander – Guterl 2015, 89), Forster's melodramatic scenes invariably point to the anxiety of his protagonists and their frustration with a world that lacks spiritual power. They also seem to embody this paradoxical hotel binarism. The modernist trope of failed epiphanies and queer affect is connected to the preexisting schema of melodrama. The modernist uses of affect, avant-garde sentimentality, as well as the relevance of camp aesthetics in its uninterrupted flow of male homosexual ostentation, exaggeration, flamboyance, and theatricality, point to the fact that Forster's short stories trigger a backward dialectical movement. This anachronistic movement concerns the centrality of melodrama in the critical, literary, and aesthetic discourses of continental modernity and the revisiting of this "persistence of the seemingly antiquated theatrical form of melodrama" in Forster's *oeuvre* (Kohlmann 2013, 337). Forster reworks and revives the legacy of melodrama via the lens of sentimentality, failed epiphany, queer affect, and a trope that connects with the modernist call to open up for new modes of being.<sup>2</sup> Triggering a forlorn dialectics, Forster's melodramas blur into the already established pattern of melodrama in modernity.

A melodrama is a dramatic work marked by its overt sensationalism. Its origins can be traced in the French popular theatre and the continental, Italian and Spanish drama. Designed to appeal strongly to the emotions – Victorian melodramas<sup>3</sup> featured orchestral music accompanying the bombastic action – melodramas are artistic or literary forms that favour unrestrained sentimentality. Since, melodramas typically concentrate on feelings and feature largely stereotyped characters, sensationalism often takes precedence over detailed characterization. This is an additional thread that links melodrama with Forster's Tyrrhenian hotel stories. It is this stereotyping and this privileging of sensationalism that is accountable for the unequivocal, pejorative use of the term in contemporary criticism, and that also, perhaps, accounts for the recurrent criticism surrounding Forster's stories.

In his seminal genealogy of melodrama, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (1965), Peter Brooks maintains that

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<sup>2</sup> For an exploration of modernist dialectics with the tradition of melodrama refer to Kohlmann (2013, 337–352).

<sup>3</sup> See Booth (1965) for an overview of British stage and screen romantic and historical melodrama spectacles.

melodrama is an underrepresented, crucial mode of expression in modern literature. Having explored stage melodrama as a dominant popular form in the nineteenth century, Brooks moves on to Balzac and Henry James to show how the realism of these novelists avails itself of the excess of melodrama. Brooks maintains that the apprehension of experience through melodramatizing as a mode of imagination connects melodramatic works to fantasy or mythography and its posterior uses in modernism. Preoccupied with the ways literature articulates the melodramatic and having Balzac's "vulgar melodramatism" (1976, 3) as a starting point, Brooks seems to claim that melodrama unites high and low cultural sensibilities through the ontological anxiety that it brings forth.

While there appear to be only two fleeting references to the relevance of melodrama to Forster's modernist fiction (Brooks 1976, 130–131), this essay posits Forster's fiction and his short (hotel) stories as pivotal to any critical understanding of melodrama. Brooks maintains that in the sphere of melodrama: "we can observe the narrator pressuring the surface of reality (the surface of his text) in order to make it yield the full, true terms of his story" (1976, 1–2). Forster's narrators in both stories explored here function in identical ways pointing to the profound through the mundane. One can adduce a multitude of examples, but the overarching principle seems to be the fact that, in literary melodrama, "the novel is constantly tensed to catch this essential drama, to go beyond the surface of the real to the truer, hidden reality, to open up the world of spirit" (Brooks 1976, 2).

Brooks underscores the fact that the melodramatic is a peculiar modern mode: "[w]e might, finally, do well to recognize the melodramatic mode as a central fact of the modern sensibility" (1976, 21). This chain of association further substantiates the link with the hotel culture and the pervasive hotel spirit as a product of modernity in Forster's modernist, literary hotels. Besides, echoing Wallace Stevens, Brooks clearly posits melodrama as the "central poetry," the dominant shaping force of literary modernity in the relevant part of his treatise entitled "Melodrama: A Central Poetry" (1976, 200). Brooks summarizes all the tenets and principles of the melodramatic mode as hues of the modern sensibility as such: "[A]n exciting, excessive, parabolic story – from the banal stuff of reality. States of being beyond the immediate context of the narrative, and in excess of it, have been brought to bear on it, to charge it with intenser significances" (1976, 2). The melodramatic mode points "to what lies behind, to the spiritual reality which is the true scene of the highly colored drama to be played out in the novel" (Brooks 1976, 2).

Ross Chambers expands on this argument claiming that the genre of melodrama also includes authors like Forster whose (hotel) melodramas, unlike those of the masters

of continental melodrama, remain critically underrepresented. The same can be argued about the processes through which Forster's modernist fiction triggers a backward dialectical movement that brings forth and redirects the legacy of melodrama. I argue that his hotel stories present readers with what Chambers perceives as "the adaptation of the melodramatic sensibility, not only into that genre of 'ennobled melodrama' that is the drama of Hugo and Dumas père, but also into the novelistic tradition of moral concern" (1986, 116). He maintains that while the melodramatic tradition "originates with Balzac," it continues to flourish "in Dostoievski, Henry James, and twentieth-century descendants such as D.H. Lawrence and E.M. Forster" (Chambers 1986, 116).

In spite of these clearly established threads and connections, Forster's fiction remains conspicuously absent from the existing contemporary scholarship on melodrama.<sup>4</sup> For example, Forster is not included in *The Cambridge Companion to English Melodrama* (Williams 2018). Having said that, Lionel Trilling offers one of the most original, if not one of the most enthusiastic, appraisals of Forster's powerful melodrama asserting that Forster's fiction "delights in surprise and melodrama and has a kind of addiction to sudden death" (1971, 10). However, Trilling's focus is not on Forster's hotel literature. Discussing Forster's underdeveloped plots, a claim that seems to have a direct bearing on his short stories, he maintains that "they are always sharp and definite, for he expresses difference by means of struggle, and struggle by means of open conflict so intense as to flare into melodrama and even into physical violence" (Trilling 1971, 12). Trilling's terse aphorism summarizes the debate on the centrality of melodrama in Forster: "he contemplates by means of hot melodrama" (1971, 65).

Other scholars posit the Forsterian melodrama less favourably. In his discussion of the recurrence of melodrama in Forster's literary production, Herbert Marshall McLuhan maintains that it does not yield new insights as it remains, for the most part, mechanical (1997, 138). Unlike Trilling, he finds "Forster's embarrassing passion for the melodrama of coincidence" rather disconcerting, also suggesting that it often borders superficiality: "the conflicts and cleavages of melodrama can never yield new insight because they

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<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, Josie Gill revisits the literary trope of Forsterian melodrama showcasing its contemporary relevance in her discussion of Zadie Smith's 2000 novel *White Teeth* maintaining that it is written "in a Forsterian comic mode characterized by coincidence, irrationality, humour and melodrama, designed, in the vein of Forster's novels, to convey the 'messy concoction' of life" (Gill 2020, 84–85). She also addresses Smith's "defence of Forster's melodramatic plots" maintaining that, for Smith, Forster's melodrama constitutes one of his most peculiar charms (Gill 2013, 17).

are mechanically predetermined. In fact, melodrama, like the split man, is not an artistic achievement but the by-product of cultural neurosis” (McLuhan 1997, 139).

The Tyrrhenian hotel stories traced in this essay are telling examples of this dynamics and the relevance of Forster’s hotel *oeuvre* to critical discourses on the literary and cultural construction of melodrama hitherto overlooked. Ostensibly unconnected, Forster’s hotel-related stories “The Story of a Panic” (1904) and “The Story of the Siren” (1920) are marked by their hotel-sponsored melodrama, evident in the centrality of a quasi-operatic death trope, and their heavy ontological aura. Both stories, described by Forster himself as “fantasies” that “were written at various dates previous to the first world war” (Forster qtd. in Leavitt and Mitchell 2001, vii) feature hotel settings that function as death-arias and portend death through, on the one hand, outbursts of melodrama, verbosity, quasi-atavistic, histrionic, moments of return to the mythological past, and on the other, through the depiction of the tension between Catholicism and the immanence of paganism.

Earlier critical works have attempted to trace the eclectic affinities of the two hotel stories. S.P. Rosenbaum points to the original reception of both stories suggesting that they were commonly perceived as inherently flawed due to their melodramatism and fancifulness:

Even closer to ‘The Story of a Panic’, and a better story than either it or ‘Albergo Empedocle’, is ‘The Story of the Siren’, which the *Temple Bar* nevertheless rejected early in 1904 (*LTC*, p. ix). The story remained unpublished until 1920, when Virginia and Leonard Woolf printed it [...] as the ninth publication of the Hogarth Press and the first by a member of the Bloomsbury Group other than themselves. Virginia did not think ‘The Story of the Siren’ would sell very well, and Roger Fry, unaware of when it was written, complained to her, that ‘It’s always the same theme; I wish he could get something new and more solidly constructed. He exploits too much of his fancy.’ (qtd. in Rosenbaum 1994, 47)

It is the undeniable sensational dimension of Forster’s hotel melodramas that has invited criticism and skepticism in responses to Forster’s *oeuvre*. Being the very nature of melodrama, strong sensationalism often takes precedence over detailed characterization in Forster. Krzysztof Fordoński also brings the two stories together, via the shared theme of death, distinguishing them both, as well as *A Room with a View*, from the totality of Forster’s fiction on Italy:

At least three times, [...] Forster introduces descriptions of tragic deaths of Italians which in each case awake the English characters from their spiritual slumber and put them on the path to self-awareness. And yet in each case the Italians are merely sketched, the young man murdered in Piazza Signoria [...] does not even have a name. (Fordoński 2012, 26)

## 2. The Melodrama(s) of Hotel Life in "The Story of a Panic"

Published in 1904, "The Story of a Panic" was conceived and largely written in 1902 on the occasion of Forster's hotel stay in Ravello. More specifically, Forster wrote the most part of the short story, a sure allusion to his homosexual panic apropos the wild, pagan, emancipatory, eroticism of Italy, while in residence (Friday, May 22<sup>nd</sup> – Thursday, May 28<sup>th</sup> 1902) at the Villa Palumbo in Ravello, Amalfi Coast (Heath 2008, 538). This hotel story is special in that it also marks Forster's literary breakthrough following a long gestation period. On May 25, 1902, Forster took what later proved to be a life-changing walk near his Ravello hotel. Here is how the writer describes his quasi-epiphanic experience also pointing to the consistent centrality of hotels in his fiction:

I think it was in May of 1902 that I took a walk near Ravello, I sat down in a valley, a few miles above the town, and suddenly the first chapter of the story, "The Story of a Panic", the first story I ever wrote, rushed into my mind as if it had waited for me there. I received it as an entity and wrote it out as soon as I returned to the hotel. (qtd. in Beauman 1993, 112)

It appears that Forster's hotel is identical with the unnamed "delightful little hotel" in Ravello, the residence of the panic-stricken, travelling protagonist in "The Story of a Panic" (Forster 2001a, 1). The hotel residents, the common Forsterian entourage of idiosyncratic British intellectuals, artists, closeted homosexuals, aunts, and landladies on their escapist, Mediterranean grand tour, are progressively exposed to a three-part melodrama. The first part concerns a group picnic to a secluded valley near Ravello and Eustace's shocking encounter with the spirit of paganism or with what reads like a secular theophany of God Pan himself. The second traces the frantic return to the buffer zone of the Ravello hotel and the anticipated removal from the most disconcerting pagan

spectacles of the countryside, whereas the third part of the story hosts the full *crescendo* of the hotel melodrama, whereby chaos erupts within the hotel itself.

In the first part of the story, Eustace Robinson, “a boy of about fourteen” and nephew of the “two Miss Robinsons” (Forster 2001a, 1) surreally encounters the mythological spirit of place. What Eustace perceives as Pan still roaming the woods and clearings of Ravello – a near-certain allusion to Forster’s epiphanic moment on the outskirts of the selfsame town – shocks the conventional conceptions of morality of his fellow travellers like Mr. Tytler, the narrator of the story. Eustace’s “primal panic terror tinged with desire” (De Cicco 2015, 58) points to the traditional mythological accounts of Pan: “Pan causes his subjects to feel that their own queer, uncontrollable desires – e.g., panic dread/passion – are inherent and inescapable. Pan queers the subject by exposing the sexual dissidence that lies dormant within the individual” (De Cicco 2015, 59). Pan/ic-stricken and alarmed, Eustace indulges in an unprecedented fit and is quickly transported to his hotel room. Eustace’s fellow-travellers believe that his prompt removal from the flora and fauna of the Tyrrhenian hills of Ravello and subsequent transport to the civil and civilizing hotel setting will signal the end of his existential nausea. Having glimpsed at the awe-inspiring, queer monstrosity of Pan, who is notorious for his hypersexualized, untamed desires, Eustace feels overwhelmed by the force of this raw magnetism. His, typically Forsterian, homosexual awakening comes crashing through the superficial veneer and façade of civilized, cosmopolitan modernity. It is effectively set against the hotel and its rigid set of conventions, cosmopolitan rituals, highbrow clientele, social refinement, and non-negotiable moral decorum.

The third part of the genuine melodrama in “The Story of a Panic,” takes place when Eustace is returned to his hotel room. The culmination of his violent outburst challenges the limits of tolerance of the hotel residents, as well as the very ordered nature of the place itself. Eustace’s melodramatic fit and unrestricted mobility undoes the literal taxonomy and classification of the hotel, the arrangement of rooms that the hotel residents inhabit, the public spaces that visitors are permitted to access, and the private parts of the hotel gardens as his literal and metaphorical transgressive Pan/ic grants him access to the most inaccessible parts of the hotel. It simultaneously fosters a homosexual *erotica* that originally is beyond Eustace’s, or anyone else’s, comprehension. Eustace’s escape is mostly achieved through the assistance of Gennaro, the sympathetic hotel waiter, who facilitates Eustace’s escape from the hotel confinement. Resembling an ill-fated pair of star-crossed lovers, Eustace and Gennaro leap into the hotel courtyard together, but the fall kills Gennaro. Uninjured and emancipated, Eustace manages to climb over the



hotel garden walls. He escapes, presumably forever, a sure fate of institutionalization and incarceration on the "false" premise of some unidentified psychiatric disorder prompted by his fury manifested in his erratic behaviour following his conscious revisiting of the forlorn, mystical and pagan past, which challenges the constraints of secular reasoning. Eustace's latent homosexuality possibly accounts for what is perceived as a deep-seated, repressed rage. The operatic melodrama of the hotel story ends with the piercing screams and loud cries of the "nice landlady, Signora Scafetti" (Forster 2001a, 1) – an apt melodramatic finale, which seems to recall the notions of fanfare, tension-building, escapist frenzy, and queer death as fundamentals of the emotive potential of the melodramatic dialectic formulated by Brooks.

The narrator finds Eustace repellent in that he lacks the conspicuously manly look of most teenage English boys: "his features were pale, his chest contracted, and his muscles undeveloped. His aunts thought him delicate" (Forster 2001a, 2). Eustace's fear of swimming further corroborates his failure to comply with the accepted standards and expectations of virility as defined by the narrator: "Every English boy should be able to swim" (Forster 2001a, 2). Following Pan's theophany and Eustace's breakdown, the narrator clearly alludes to the disciplining potential of the Edwardian hotel culture as a guarantor of authority and moral standards that cannot tolerate any sort of queer-ness: "I changed the conversation by asking what we should say at the hotel. After some discussion, it was agreed that we should say nothing, either there or in our letters home" (Forster 2001a, 10).

Contrary to the narrator's suggested downplaying of the crisis, Forster juxtaposes Eustace's desire to access the hotel with the intensity of his desire, craving, and longing for Gennaro's presence. Subverting the narrator's hopes regarding the normative potential of the hotel, Eustace's frenzy seems to transform the story into a hotel narrative of queer desire through the excess of melodramatic cries and the "Mode of Excess" as per Brooks' formulation (1976, n.p.): Answering Mr. Sandbach's question about why Eustace would like to see Gennaro, the boy utters exuberantly, "'Because, because I do, I do; because, because I do.' He danced away into the darkening wood to the rhythm of his words" (Forster 2001a, 11). Given the fact that Forster's hotels often embody impermanence and flux, the Ravello hotel seems to aggravate things further rather than placating Eustace's restlessness as it was originally hoped. While Eustace can no longer conceal his desire, the fair share of Italian melodrama and extravagance of the extract sublimate his displays of affection:

But when we came to the Piazza, in front of the cathedral, he screamed out: ‘Gennaro! Gennaro!’ at the top of his voice, and began running up the little alley that led to the hotel. Sure enough, there was Gennaro at the end of it, with his arms and legs sticking out of the nice English-speaking waiter’s dress suit [...] Eustace sprang to meet him, and leapt right up into his arms, and put his own arms round his neck. And this in the presence, not only of us, but also of the landlady, the chambermaid, the *facchino*,<sup>5</sup> and of two American ladies who were coming for a few days’ visit to the little hotel [...] Meanwhile, Gennaro, instead of attending to the wants of the two new ladies, carried Eustace into the house, as if it was the most natural thing in the world. (Forster 2001a, 12–13)

The intense, sexualised physicality between Eustace and Gennaro becomes more pronounced in the scene of Eustace’s frenzy. While Gennaro attempts to placate him, the narrator discerns what seems to be the “grotesque figure of the young man, and the slim little white-robed boy. Gennaro had his arm around Eustace’s neck” (Forster 2001a, 19). Their intimacy is also suggested in the passage where, much to the consternation of Eustace’s fellow hotel banqueters, they converse in the singular form: “To my annoyance, Gennaro, in his answer, made use of the second person singular – a form only used when addressing those who are both intimates and equals [...] an impertinence of this kind was an affront to us all” (Forster 2001a, 13). While melodrama is sustained throughout, the story also serves as a wry exploration of the pervasive socio-political climate of its time, apparent in the ridiculousness of the narrator’s racist admonitions to the “poor Italian fisher-boy” to behave respectfully to the “young English gentleman,” as well as his conviction that “the wretched down-trodden Italians have no pride” (Forster 2001a, 14). Now that the semblance of order is established the narrator and all members of the entourage of British expatriates finally withdraw to their hotel rooms.

But alas, the narrator’s laconic description points to the nocturnal melodrama now unfolding in the hotel gardens disrupting the façade of propriety: “But the day was nothing to the night” (Forster 2001a, 14). The sheer surrealness and implausibility of the spectacle that the omniscient, all-seeing, narrator observes from his panoptic, “first floor” room which looks “out on to the garden – or terrace” (Forster 2001a, 15) could be roughly summarized as an erratic, fantastical pastiche of Victorian melodrama:

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<sup>5</sup> There is a note on Forster’s reference to the “*facchino*” (12) in the “Explanatory Notes” on the text: “*facchino*. In Italian, a porter” (Forster 2001a, 193).

"I realized that Eustace had got out of bed, and that we were in for something more. I hastily dressed myself, and went down into the dining-room which opened upon the terrace" (15). Rambling like a somnambulist, Eustace feels exasperated. His pleas and cries, while he is temporarily apprehended by Gennaro as his assailant, point to the emancipatory potential of the hotel. When Eustace goes "wild in the hotel," Forster seems to emphatically assert that he happens to be, "contra public moral outrage," in "the right place for all the right reasons" (Levander and Guterl 2015, 49). Levander and Guterl point to the hotel room potential for all sorts of transgressions and its being a place where anything can literally happen:

The hotel room is thus a production site – one of many – for the modern sexual self. And hotels work, generally, to create and confirm contemporary notions of sex and sexuality, and to make possible, at the same time, a planned, if carefully delimited, escape from the normal rules, especially, but not only, for men. There are, then, no "misdeeds" in a hotel room; no one really behaves really badly there, and this tends to be the case because of the fluidity and seeming infinite flexibility. (2015, 49)

In its daring and progressive heights and subversive appeal, Forster's hotel literature seems to foreshadow the popularity of queer or gay-friendly hotels in postmodernity. Fostering flamboyant, extravagant displays of queer desire and sensuality, like Eustace and Gennaro's intense physicality and tenderness, Forster's Ravello hotel dares to imagine the unimaginable "in a most alarming way" through the nocturnal melodrama at play in the story (Forster 2001a, 16).

"Singing and chattering to himself" (Forster 2001a, 16), Eustace soon becomes the protagonist of his own Italian hotel opera. Speaking of the flora and fauna of Italy, the perennial drama of the gulf on Naples, the evocative inlet of the Tyrrhenian sea, "the smoking cone of Vesuvius," "the showers of white rose-leaves that were tangled in his hair," Eustace aptly contextualizes his melodrama (Forster 2001a, 16–17). For his melodramatic outburst to become more plausible, Forster depicts him "crying" in the "starlight" (Forster 2001a, 17). Eustace's quasi-literal hotel *melodramma* points to the fundamentals of the genre seeming to be perfectly in context in the vicinity of Naples. As if part of an Italian opera, Eustace's grandiose emotional tensions and melodramatic antics are communicated and amplified by the appropriate music that highlights the fact that he succumbs to a larger-than-life self-realization while "singing, first low, then loud—singing five-finger exercises, scales, hymn tunes, scraps of Wagner – anything that came

into his head” (Forster 2001a, 16). Eustace’s hotel aria grows “stronger and stronger” and ends “with a tremendous shout” which awakes and mortifies “everyone who was still sleeping in the hotel” (Forster 2001a, 16). His melodramatic singing reads as the swan song of his hotel opera. The hotel melodrama of the story literally ends with Eustace’s incoherent song followed by a dramatic sequence of screams. Besides, the affinities of Forster’s fiction with the genre of opera have been repeatedly explored. For example, Judith Scherer Herz explores Forster’s musicality maintaining that: “the construction of Forster’s novels often resembles that of the ‘classical’ opera (Mozart-Weber-Verdi)” (1997, 140). Forster most certainly used musical elements and forms to structure his literary works but the connection between his allusions to opera and the melodramatic characterization of his queer protagonists has not always been clear. The affiliation of the operatic and the melodramatic element in Forster’s short stories and the complex ways these are implicated in one another allows for a more dynamic unfolding of queer desire within the emancipatory hotel premises.

The melodramatic end of the story of Caterina Giusti that Gennaro recites also subtly foreshadows the tragic end of the failed homosexual saga of the story. Caterina, Eustace’s dramatic counterpart, is locked in a room while Gennaro strives, in vain, to rescue her: “They would not let her out, though I begged, and prayed, and cursed, and beat the door, and climbed the wall” (Forster 2001a, 21). The hotel proprietress implies that a similar disciplining fate awaits Eustace within the civilized matrix of the hotel: “‘Now they are caught,’ cried Signora Scafetti. ‘There is no other way out’” (Forster 2001a, 22). Nonetheless, Eustace manages to escape following a comedy of errors and Gennaro’s self-sacrificial helping hand. It is poor Gennaro instead, who pays the price for his complicity in the manic outrage and his triggering of the homosexual desire of Eustace.

While Eustace’s final, operatic cry resonates through the hotel, Gennaro perishes. As suggested by the narrator’s commentary, the hyperbole and intensity of Eustace’s cry – “a strange loud cry, such as I should not have thought the human voice could have produced” (Forster 2001a, 22) – brings forth “the desire to express all” as a fundamental characteristic of the melodramatic mode as per Brooks’ formulation (1976, 4): “Nothing is spared because nothing is left unsaid; the characters stand on stage and utter the unspeakable, give voice to their deepest feelings, dramatize through their heightened and polarized words and gestures the whole lesson of their relationship” (Brooks 1976, 4). The common, Forsterian deferral of same-sex desire through the intimacy of the protagonists with what reads as an untamed death drive, as well as the stereotyping of Gennaro, cannot detract from the blatant queer homosociality of the scene.

The genuine hotel melodrama of the story ends with the sight of rose leaves falling on Gennaro's dead body lying within the Ravello hotel grounds. The evocation of St. Gennaro's bloody sacrifice authorizes the melodramatic intensity of the story. Two weeks prior to his writing of "The Story of a Panic," Forster sees "San Gennaro's once-living blood imprisoned in a glass bottle in a glass case and chained to a priest" (Heath 2008, 538). More specifically, having crossed the Tyrrhenian sea from Messina accompanied by his mother, Forster arrives in Naples on the 8<sup>th</sup> of May, "four days too late to see the festival of the liquefaction of the blood of San Gennaro" (Heath 2008, 537). Having been misinformed by an inaccurate travel publication, Forster and his mother miss the Catholic extravaganza of the festival and check in at the Neapolitan "Hotel Belle Vue (M. Scafetti, prop.)" (Heath 2008, 537). Apart from the redemptive hotel waiter named Gennaro, Signora Scafetti is a most certain echo of the hotel proprietress of the Forsters' in Naples. Having invoked the imagery of San Gennaro's blood and Forster's actual Neapolitan hotel stay, the Ravello hotel in "The Story of a Panic" then becomes intelligible only if it is regarded as an amalgam of forces that point to melodrama. In the final scene, the hotel clearly becomes a token of a melodrama that invokes redemption and perdition, life and death: "rose leaves fell on us as we carried him in. Signora Scafetti burst into screams at the sight of the dead body, and, far down the valley towards the sea, there still resounded the shouts and the laughter of the escaping boy" (Forster 2001a, 23).

### 3. The Melodrama(s) of Hotel Life in "The Story of the Siren"

Two fleeting references to an unnamed hotel complicate the melodrama and the failed epiphanies at work in Forster's "The Story of the Siren." Published in 1920, the unsettling story was conceived and written in 1902 following one of his Italian hotel sojourns. This essay presents evidence suggesting that, as a matter of fact, the setting of "The Story of the Siren" could be viewed as a synthetic amalgam of Palermo and Capri rather than its supposed, exclusively Sicilian setting. Besides, Capri serves as the ideal backdrop for Forster's masculinist melodrama to evolve organically. Given Capri's elite associations, pomp, aura of exclusivity, and cosmopolitanism, and with Italy being stereotypically viewed as an apt place for the unfolding of maximalist melodramas in literature, cinematography, and music, this new identification of Capri as a potential covert setting of "The Story of the Siren" underscores these problematics.

In his exploration of Italian male homosexuality in art, motion pictures, and music through the lens of the antithetical pairing of realism and melodrama, John Champagne maintains that “the corollary of the Italian man as prone to passion is the portrayal of Italy as a place of sexual licentiousness” (2015, 4). Besides, Champagne repeatedly acknowledges his indebtedness to the long line of literature on Italian homosexual melodrama, quoting, as he does, extensively from the historian George Mosse. In the context of his discussion of the construction of Italian masculinities as essentially more effeminate, Champagne maintains that “modern European masculinity depended on displays of affect that constituted the antithesis of the melodramatic *and* that Italian men were typically exempt from this requirement” (2015, 4). Forster seems to perennially contemplate this imaginative construction of a radical, melodramatic, open-minded Italy as a place of promiscuity and emancipation. Fordoński addresses the recurrent “myth of Italy as a homosexual haven” while tracing Forster’s imaginative conflation of Southern Italy with Greece via the overarching notion of Greek love (Fordoński 2010, 92). Being exempt from the stigmatization and puritan morality of middle-class Britain, the excessive sensualism and the decorative lushness of Italian hotels in Ravello and Palermo or Capri offer an ideal, homoerotically charged, maximalist background for the perils of queer melodrama to emerge.

“The story of the Siren” is preoccupied with two marine ordeals. The first, which is narrated, thus constituting a story within the story, concerns the mysterious, enigmatic predicament of a vacationing Englishman who goads a Sicilian local (Giuseppe) into diving to the sea floor. While deep in the water of the grotto Giuseppe encounters a mythical siren, whose marine realm encompasses the sea caves and stereotypically lures mariners to destruction. Giuseppe is hauled out barely breathing but radically transformed; innocence is irrevocably lost and chaos ensues. The underwater trial of Giuseppe is narrated by his poor brother himself who—being an avid swimmer and the boatman of an entourage of boastful English visitors to some idyllic Italian sea caves—is ironically doomed to undergo the second liquid ordeal of the short story repeating his brother’s marine feat in a melodramatic *crescendo*. The young man undresses and dives in order to rescue the book of the narrator/protagonist of the story who enjoys the pastoral vision of the statuesque naked man with a sexual force amounting to tension in one of Forster’s rare, homoerotically charged scenes. The soaked, religious notebook is recovered from the bottom of the grotto and, unlike his brother, the sensual, marine diver is spared this time. Luckily, there is no glimpse of the ominous female siren.

While seemingly incompatible with the maximalism, cosmopolitanism and ostentatious air of the hotel where the affluent, complacent protagonists of the story reside, the

overflow of sentimentality and the sequence of pseudo-epiphanic moments at play in the story is, in a pretty unexpected twist, fostered by the very hotel itself and its aesthetics of excess. The narrator of the story writes his seminal, religious book on the Deist Controversy while being a hotel resident. He carries his manuscript along while touring the Mediterranean coast and accidentally loses it when it slips from his hands disclosing its leaves quivering into blue. Having witnessed the accident of the surreal immersion of the book in the opaque waters of the grotto, the protagonist's aunt seems to affirm Forster's own view of the hotel as a creative shelter for aspiring writers: "'It is such a pity,' said my aunt, 'that you will not finish your work in the hotel'" (Forster 2001b, 153).

Thus, readers are presented with a short story that mirrors Foster's actual hotel sojourn. Besides, only a week prior to Forster's 1902 Capri stay which, as I maintain, seems to have inspired the setting of "The Story of the Siren," the author writes extensive parts of "The Story of a Panic" while being a Ravello hotel resident (Heath 2008, 538). The geographical proximity of Ravello in "The Story of a Panic" and what reads as the synthetic amalgam of Palermo and Capri in "The Story of the Siren" offers additional corroborating evidence to the affiliation attempted here via the lens of melodrama.

Hence, despite its anonymity, the hotel mentioned in "The Story of the Siren" seems to also mirror the actual Capri hotel Forster stayed at while on the Tyrrhenian Island. As far as the particulars of the visit of the Forsters to the *Quisisana* are concerned, the check-in date is May 31<sup>st</sup> with the checkout date being estimated for approximately a week later (end of the first week of June, 1902) as per Heath's claim (2008, 538). Known for its prominent location on the fashionable Capri *piazzetta* and opposite the Hotel *La Residenza* and the Hotel *Villa Sanfelice*, the *Quisisana* boasts about having hosted many distinguished guests including Oscar Wilde (along with Lord Alfred Douglas). The British doctor George Sidney Clark first established the hotel as sanatorium in 1845, and the hotel official website offers a sketchy chronology mentioning, under "Mario Morgano's Quisisana" section, that Clark's sanatorium gradually took on the function of a residence. The transition was formalized in 1861 when it officially became the *Grand Hotel Quisisana*. "Qui si sana" can be literally transcribed as "here one heals" and certainly relates to the mild climate of Capri that was to cure the ailments typically afflicting the weather-wise disadvantaged northerners (n.p.).

Additional corroborating evidence challenges the accepted setting of the story as exclusively Sicilian. Besides, the story features a set of references to the Blue Grotto of Capri itself: "The Blue Grotto at Capri contains only more blue water, not bluer water" (Forster 2001b, 154). While there is an abundance of sea caves in the Mediterranean,

the reference to the sublime beauty of the famed *Grotta Azzurra* shows that Forster was definitely contemplating, to say the least, the island of Capri, the Tyrrhenian Sea on the south side of the Gulf of Naples, and, by extension, the *Quisisana* itself while writing the story. The archival material from the 1902 horrifying visit of the Forsters to the awe-inspiring sea cave also points to the same direction. The June 1<sup>st</sup> 1902 account of the trip to the Capri cave by Forster's mother seems to evoke the unsettling spirit that the author will later immortalize in the story itself: "I felt quite nervous in the dark grottoes" (Heath 2008, 538). In a June 8 letter from the neighbouring Castellammare di Stabia she mentions that they were both: "much excited with the Blue Grotto" (Heath 2008, 538).

However, the most powerful evidence linking the setting with Capri can be traced in a reference to the advent of the funicular railway: "One English lady in particular, of very high birth, came, and has written a book about the place, and it was through her that the Improvement Syndicate was formed, which is about to connect the hotels with the station by a funicular railway" (Forster 2001b, 156). With 1902 being the date of Forster's visit to Capri and with 1905 marking the first operation of the scenic *Funicolare di Capri* (officially inaugurated in 1907), the connection is self-evident. The railway line connects the *Marina Grande* on the coast with the central *Piazza Umberto I*. Given the fact that the distance between the *Quisisana* and the funicular is approximately 220 metres, all it takes to be transported from the hotel to the station is a three-minute walk. Forster's description that the funicular "connect[s] the hotel with the station" (Forster 2001b, 156) could not have proven more accurate. So is the reference to the Society "Improvement Syndicate" (Forster 2001b, 156) that supposedly fostered its creation. The formation of the Italian-American Society SIPPIC (*la società proprietaria dei contatori*) in 1892 provided the impetus required for reforms marking the onset of the Capri development project (Angelini 2004, 36–39). While the tourist industry of Sicily, the alleged setting of the story, was still dormant and the available facilities substandard, Capri enjoyed relative prosperity and a steady influx of visitors. This was also on account of its being in close proximity to mainland Italy, Naples, Pompeii, as well as the attractions of Amalfi coast. With the sole exception of the *Tranvia di Palermo-Monreale (Funicolare di Monreale)* in Sicily – which operated at the time of Forster's visit but is removed from the sea and does not seem to link any major hotels with a marina of any kind – there is no evidence suggesting that there is a funicular in close proximity to any Sicilian sea caves at the time. In any case, the *Quisisana*, perhaps conflated with the *Hotel de France* in Palermo where Forster spent time in April 1902 seems to have been the model for the setting of the story (Heath 2008, 536).



In his recent exploration of the emancipatory potential of the island of Capri through the lens of literature, Jamie James maintains that, in the British imaginative intercourse with the Tyrrhenian island, Capri "serves as an emblem of freedom" often functioning as a queer "hedonistic dreamland" (James 2019, 5). While James lengthily explores the transgressive power of Capri in authors like Joseph Conrad and D.H. Lawrence claiming that it is the tolerant and accepting fabric of the cultural capital of the island itself that seems to have inspired the construction of some of their queerest characters, the question of the applicability of the same pattern to Forster's short story still remains elusive. More specifically, there is only a passing reference to Forster in the context of an evaluation of the daring heights of his queer literature. There, James rightfully maintains that Forster was for the most part "writing in code" (James 2019, 120).

However, the broad emancipatory effect of Capri on Forster, made manifest in the charged homosexual erotica of the sea cave scene, is not registered. I maintain that this omission can be attributed to the heretofore erroneous identification of the setting of the short story with Sicily. In a pretty ironic twist, what seems to propose a definitive identification of "The Story of the Siren" with Capri is the self-evident; the very existence of the mythical siren herself and the mythology surrounding her Tyrrhenian marine realm. The notorious affinities of Capri with enchantment have a long tradition with the island being traditionally identified with an oversexualized version of the Homeric Siren Island: "few would challenge Capri's claim, supported by centuries of cheap souvenirs, to be the Siren Island. [...] for the rhapsodes who chanted *The Odyssey*, the islands of the Tyrrhenian Sea were remote, legendary places that only venturesome sailors had ever seen (James 2019, 8). James also cites the "noncanonical Homeric myth" of the founder of Naples, the alluring Tyrrhenian Siren Partenope (Parthenope), and traces the tangible contemporary extensions of the myth in the toponymy of the Neapolitan shore across from Capri maintaining that it adds "corroboration to Capri's claim" (James 2019, 8).

In his travelogue *Siren Land: A Celebration of Life in Southern Italy*, Norman Douglas seems to also surrender to these critical discourses associating Capri with the mythical habitat of the Homeric Sirens (Douglas 1929). Returning to James, his literary historicizing of the Naples Aquarium also points to the horror of prominent visitors aghast at the unorthodox sight of "anthropomorphic fish" or monstrous sirenoids being served at dinner (James 2019, 267). The grotesque dish served ironically points to the taming of the pagan past of Capri: "The boiled Siren lay on a bed of greens, encircled by a wreath of pink coral stems" (James 2019, 267). The paradoxical culinary tradition points to the uncanny convergence of the mythical and the secular through the manifestation of the symbol of

the siren. This emancipatory convergence of past and present also seems to lie at the heart of Forster's "The Story of the Siren," where the ritualistic immersions of sailors result in their near-fatal encounters with the siren. Her manifestations are sure echoes of the mythological past of Capri and potent allusions to the perils of (self) exploration.

In shedding critical attention to Forster's early reflections on hotel culture and the literary hotel as a haven for aspiring writers through the matter of the story's backdrop, I am suggesting that the work – being a heterogeneous amalgam – becomes intelligible only if its setting is regarded synthetically. The evidence that the story seems to have also been inspired by Capri points to the fact that Forster seeks to create an apt, maximalist, cosmopolitan setting for his Italian hotel melodrama to unfold. The liberating open-mindedness, aesthetics of excess, and sophistication of destinations with the cultural capital of Ravello and Capri can stage such melodramas and give rise to epiphanic and sentimental moments arising from the juxtaposition of the mythical, pagan, metaphysical context of the hotel surroundings and the artificial, physical setting of the hotel premises.

"For all its absurdity and superstition" (Forster 2001b, 158), the story portends death through fits of melodrama, verbosity, and the near-palpable tension between Catholicism and the immanence of paganism, homosexuality, and heteronormativity. Following his apocalyptic glimpse at the siren, Giuseppe experiences schizophrenic fits; he roams the streets looking haggard and forlorn. The hotel owners side with the Catholic Church ruthlessly demonising him. They eventually have him ostracized instigating violence and, perhaps, go as far as to murder his equally deranged and psychotic wife in what reads as a dark, dramatic turn of events: "They have pushed her over the cliffs into the sea" (Forster 2001b, 159). Forster's wry commentary presents readers with the clear-cut rationale of the ostentatious hoteliers: "The whole village was in tumult, and the hotel-keepers became alarmed, for the tourist season was just beginning. They met together and decided that Giuseppe and the girl must be sent inland until the child was born, and they subscribed the money" (Forster 2001b, 159). Resolved not to tolerate any sort of queerness and nonconformity, the Italian hotel owners offer a glimpse into the dark, sinister side of the hotel culture, which also induces disciplining and institutionalizes subjects that disrupt the façade of propriety. Hoteliers go as far as to introduce punitive practices for intractable people like Giuseppe. The common former function of hotels like the *Quisisana* as sanatoria points to this consistent institutionalising potential. In keeping with good taste, propriety, and the established conventions of hotel etiquette, Forster's hotel in "The Story of the Siren" seems to also emphatically bring forth the adverse effects of the emerging Edwardian hotel culture.

Thus, things come full circle and the story seems to echo and resemble its Tyrrhenian counterpart "The Story of a Panic." There, the mental breakdown, or the emancipation of the protagonist from the normative nexus of the hotel premises depending on the point of view one assumes, presupposes his flight from the hotel incarceration and his progressive somatic surrender to the sublime forces of nature. A sequence of similar escapes seems to be the solution proposed in "The Story of the Siren." There appears to be an endless set of parallels in these two hotel-related stories: Eustace encounters Pan whereas Giuseppe comes face to face with the siren, a mythological creature nonetheless. Both experience severe mental distress and an unorthodox nervous breakdown and undergo fierce disciplining by their respective hoteliers or local hotel owners. Both eventually escape. The negative register of the hotel culture feeds melodrama in that it also seems to embody the social restraints, the impersonal, inhibiting rules imposed on those that have metaphorically dared to get a glimpse at the siren. Thus, the harsh dichotomies, the intense cleavages which bring forth the pathology of melodrama in Forster's fiction, culminate within the paradoxical and self-contradictory hotel culture itself. Hotels that seemingly liberate and sexually emancipate their upper-class clientele, simultaneously banish the less privileged permanent residents that fail to fulfill the highbrow, cosmopolitan mores of the Italian resort town and the prevailing, haute expectations in "The Story of the Siren." It is the punitive potential of hoteliers, who often seem to conflate authority with authoritarianism, which further fuels the vicious circle of melodrama in Giuseppe's story.

Having originally operated as a sanatorium offering supervised recuperation, the Tyrrhenian hotel in "The Story of the Siren," becomes the arbiter of the mental and emotional health and accepted moral standards of the community. It is sharply ironic that Forster's plot contemplates the exact former function of the hotel as an asylum through the hotel policing and punishment of the "madness" of Maria and Giuseppe. Operating as shady law enforcement authorities, the Italian hoteliers of "The Story of the Siren" handle the mental health crises, which pose a threat to the nascent tourist industry of the place and the reputation of the local hotels. Their nefarious practices in dealing with the psychic "aberrations" of Maria and Giuseppe, point to the disciplining power of hotel life manifested through punishment as a clear trajectory of power. The turn-of-the-century conflation of asylums – sanatoria or, at least, the indefinability surrounding them, highlights this indeterminacy. The parallels with "The Story of a Panic," where Eustace's overall sense of imprisonment within his hotel room reaches a *crescendo* inducing manic fits of rage, remains obvious throughout.

In any case, it would be a conceptual fallacy to assume, because of the semblance of anonymity and guise of cosmopolitanism, that hotels exist in a perfect vacuum operating independently of the established power relations and social conventions. Having spent a considerable amount of time as a hotel resident in a multitude of locations, Forster embeds the hotel's disciplinary potential in his fiction. Invoking the disciplinary aspect of the gaze of the hoteliers and the hotel as a panoptic setting, he designates the hotel as a metaphor of the normalising discourses and practices of institutions that wish to induce submission. Giuseppe and Maria's interchangeable states of "permanent visibility" and "permanent observation" (Foucault 1995, 201, 249) are a case in point. Forster's Italian hoteliers acquire retributive power, punishing their hotel residents for their misdemeanours. Forster emphasizes the despotism of the "hotel-keepers" who decide who must "be seen" and who must "starve" in "The Story of the Siren" (2001b, 159), suggesting that the patronizing, didactic attitude of the hoteliers, empowered by the church, safeguards their role as guarantors of the moral standards of the community: "'Do not go,' I said. 'I saw the priest go by, and someone with him. And the hotel-keepers do not like you to be seen, and if we displease them also we shall starve'" (2001b, 159).

The melodramas of Forster's hotel stories find culmination in (queer) death or banishment from the society often downplayed through the surreal near-implausibility of the plot and the grotesqueness of the melodramatic events narrated. The sequence of hotel-prompted deaths and/or marine near-losses of seductive divers and *hommes fatales* in "The Story of the Siren" points to the ambivalent intertwining of the modernist trope of hotel death with the theme of escapism in Forster's overwhelming hotel melodramas. So is the ambiguity surrounding the "murder" of Giuseppe's mentally ill wife Maria, as well as the sudden disappearance or ostracisation of Giuseppe himself following her loss.

However, a renewed sense of transcendental hope finally seems to prevail in "The Story of the Siren." The hotel-related or, rather, the hotel-sponsored melodramatic predicament of Giuseppe and his brother finally transgresses the spatio-temporal limitations in what reads like a prophetic glimmer of an emancipatory potential. The colourful rendering of the narrator's homosexual desire for the Italian diver only accentuates the irony of Forster's anticipatory envisioning of a polychromatic, multicoloured queer future: "He leaned back against the rock, breathing deep. Through all the blue-green reflections I saw him colour" (Forster 2001b, 160). This chain of associations seems to be further corroborated by the following sentence whereby a prophecy is articulated. The siren will, in spite of everything, finally "come out" singing the terrible human melodrama and signaling the end of silencing and solitude: "I heard him say: 'Silence and

loneliness cannot last for ever. It may be a hundred or a thousand years, but the sea lasts longer, and she shall come out of it and sing'" (Forster 2001b, 160).

#### **4. Conclusion: The Emotive Potential of Forster's Hotel Melodrama**

The melodramas of Forster's hotel literature present the friction and discontents that the inherently paradoxical, emerging hotel culture embodies. They oscillate between the flourishing of characters' passions and the carefully delineated stereotypical processes of normalization that serve to impose heteronormative, patriarchal, and supremacist constraints on what reads like an overflow of repressed feelings. Lavender and Guterl argue that whenever "the hotel operates as a privileged stage for this drama, it does so because of its seeming infinite malleability" (2015, 174). It is the very paradoxical malleability or changeability of hotel life that creates the tension that brings forth the terrible human melo-drama in Forster: "At the one end of the spectrum the hotel functions as an oasis and at the other as that place where actions are too unspeakable to see the light of day. The ultimate asylum in both senses of the word, the hotel can be heaven or hell, depending" (Lavender and Guterl 2015, 174).

The emancipatory dreams of the protagonists of Forster's extravagant hotel fantasies and the subversive melodramas that the emerging hotel culture of the time propagates also serve to unsettle the commonplace conventions and solipsistic, self-aggrandizing standpoints of British travellers overseas. Viewing the Tyrrhenian hotel stories of Forster through the lens of melodrama, the essay serves to highlight their emotive potential, which remains powerful in spite of their factual near-implausibility. It is this emotive potential that culminates in the unsettling of stereotypical binaries within Forster's hotel premises. Champagne maintains that "melodrama typically voices a protest of the weak against the powerful" (Champagne 2015, 30). The applicability of this reading to Forster's hotel stories can hardly be questioned in that they seem to negotiate the distance between conventional actuality and fantastic reality. Both hotel stories open up, in a decidedly modernist turn, the possibility for uncharted territories and new modes of being operating in tandem with the modernist paradox of Forster's fantastic realism (Medalie 2002, 73). Forster's stories, indeed, promote the view of melodrama and realism as opposites that are not fully antithetical but, rather, complementary.

The literary trope becomes easily identifiable by now: two short stories, inspired by Forster's respective hotel sojourns and written within the hospitable hotel premises,

mostly concerning sensitive males who experience genuine hotel-generated melodrama or false epiphanies. The geographical proximity of Ravello and Palermo/Capri in these Tyrrhenian hotel stories only accentuates the irony of the overarching, critically under-explored, tautological formula traced here. The new modes of being that Forster's male protagonists dare to experience constitute Forster's dialectics with the already established thread of melodrama in modernity. It is within the modernist hotels that stories will be written, melodrama will inevitably thrive, and death, or escape from the constraints of the heteronormative matrix will, ultimately, take place. All seems to point to the very fact that melodrama: "represents a victory over repression" in that "the melodramatic utterance breaks through everything" and "desire cries aloud its language in identification with full states of being" (Brooks 1976, 41). Driven by Foster's plot, Eustace's, Gennaro's, Giuseppe's, Maria's, Signora Scafetti's, and the narrators' melodramatic cries seem to forever echo within the hotel premises daring to articulate the ineffable at a time when this was inconceivable.

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