Matrophobia and Uncanny Kinship: Eva Hoffman's *The Secret*

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Abstract: Eva Hoffman, known primarily for her autobiography of exile, *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language* (1989), is also the author of a work of Gothic science fiction, set in the future. *The Secret: A Fable for our Time* (2001) is narrated by a human clone, whose discovery that she is the "monstrous" cloned offspring of a single mother emerges with growing discomfort at the uncanny similarities and tight bonds between her and her mother. This article places Hoffman's use of the uncanny in relation to her understanding of Holocaust history and the condition of the postmemory generation. Relying on Freud's definition of the uncanny as being "both very alien and deeply familiar," she insists that "the second generation has grown up with the uncanny." In *The Secret*, growing up with the uncanny leads to matrophobia, a strong dread of becoming one's mother. This article draws on theoretical work by Adrienne Rich and Deborah D. Rogers to argue that the novel brings to "the matrophobic Gothic" specific insights into the uncanniness of second-generation experiences of kinship, particularly kinship between survivor mothers and their daughters.

Keywords: postmemory; matrophobic gothic; gothic science fiction; memory; mother-daughter relations; Holocaust history; second generation; survivor mothers; daughters of survivors

1. Introduction: Hoffman, Matrophobia, and Holocaust History

Eva Hoffman is not primarily known for her speculations about the future. Instead, she is best known for her engagement with the past. Her autobiography, *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language* (1989), accounts for her personal history as a post-war Polish emigrant to Canada and later to the US, and her major works of non-fiction—*Exit into History* (1993), *Shtetl* (1997), and *After Such Knowledge* (2004)—examine different aspects of Eastern European and Jewish history, in which the Holocaust and its legacy play a prominent role. Hoffman has written extensively about the memory work undertaken by children of Holocaust survivors such as herself. Born just months after the end of the second world war to Jewish parents who survived in hiding, Hoffman emigrated from Poland with her family in 1959. She is thus a member of what Marianne Hirsch calls the postmemory generation, defining it thus: "'Postmemory' describes the relationship that the 'generation after' bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before—to experiences they 'remember' only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to *seem* to constitute memories in their own right. Postmemory's connection to the past is thus actually mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation" (Hirsch 2012, p. 5). Hoffman, insistent that she did not receive *memories* of the Holocaust, qualifies but also affirms Hirsch's larger point: "We did receive something very powerful. We received the emotional traces of our parents' experiences or our family's experiences or our collective experiences..." (Hartman et al. 2011, p. 114). In *After Such Knowledge*, Hoffman asserts that "the generation after receives its first knowledge of the terrible events with only

childish instruments of perception, and as a kind of fable..." (Hoffman 2005, p. 16).[1] For many of the generation after, the emotional traces of the past live uncannily in the present and exert pressure on how the future might be imagined.

Hoffman's little known and underappreciated work, *The Secret: A Fable for our Time* (2001), is a fable set in the future, looking forward even as the protagonist, Iris, looks back; she retrospectively narrates her coming-of-age from the vantage of 2025. This book can be considered a work of what Sara Wasson and Emily Adler call "Gothic science fiction". As in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, the urtext of Gothic science fiction and an intertext to Hoffman's novel, *The Secret* might be said to employ a narrative of "human-created horror through unbridled science and technology" (Wasson and Alder 2011, p. 5) to explore questions of human life, reproduction, agency, identity and freedom. In *The Secret*, it emerges that cloning is a completely practicable but uncommon and disparaged mode of human reproduction, and Iris, the narrator, gradually comes to understand that she is the "monstrous" cloned offspring of her single mother. Hoffman's understated depiction of reproductive and other technologies in the novel mobilizes a plethora of familiar Gothic tropes: the monstrous, the incestuous, the family secret, signaled by the title, the double in the guise of the clone, and, above all, the uncanny, an affect- and anxiety-laden experience of a state Hoffman consistently associates with postmemory.

The Secret displays what Wasson and Alder identify as the two essential features of the Gothic mode: "a disturbing affective lens" overlaying the narrative, and the playing out of distressful emotions "within a confined or claustrophobic environment" (Wasson and Alder 2011, p. 2), here the domestic milieu shared by Iris and her mother. This "disturbing affective lens" is the lens of the uncanny and, in keeping with Freud's definition in his 1919 essay, it is a lens which conceals as much as it reveals, familiarizes as much as it estranges.[2] These two defining features coalesce in Hoffman's portrayal of the relationship between Iris and her mother, Elizabeth. Indeed, as Iris grows into adulthood, the uncanny similarities and tight bonds between her and her mother eventually lead Iris to move from matrophilia to matrophobia, from strong love and close identification to strong dread of becoming her mother. Hoffman's work can thus also be understood in terms of what Deborah D. Rogers defines as "the matrophobic Gothic" (Rogers 2007).

Attributed to Lynn Sukenick, the term "matrophobia" was elaborated by Adrienne Rich in her 1976 study of the institution of motherhood, *Of Woman Born*, where Rich employs the term to describe "the fear not of one's mother or of motherhood but of *becoming one's mother*" (Rich [1976] 1995, p. 235). As I have discussed elsewhere, Rich, with her secular Jewish background, draws on her understanding of how stereotypes of Jewish mothers arose around the turn of the last century from their cultural disempowerment as US immigrants (Kella 2018). Rich locates the ground of matrophobia in the daughter's perception of maternal powerlessness or of maternal power derived from complicity with a patriarchal system that denies both mother and daughter autonomy. The fear of becoming one's mother, Rich writes, exists side-by-side with "a deep underlying pull toward her, a dread that if one relaxes one's guard one will identify with her completely" (Rich [1976] 1995, p. 235). A daughter suffers a type of "bondage" with her mother, who "stands for the victim in ourselves, the unfree woman, the martyr" (Rich [1976] 1995, p. 236). Matrophobia, conceptualized by Rich at a significant moment in the history of second-wave US feminism, thus describes a "womanly splitting of the self" (Rich [1976] 1995, p. 236), deemed necessary for daughters to achieve liberation from constraining gender roles and thus to attain their full human potential. Writing as both daughter and mother, Rich

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1   See Lassner (2008) for a discussion of how Holocaust experiences and stories have functioned as fables for survivors and children of survivors.
2   Freud writes that "this uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression. This reference to the factor of repression enables us, furthermore, to understand Schelling's definition of the uncanny as something which ought to have remained hidden but has come to light" (Freud [1919] 1955, p. 241).

tries to highlight how the psychological and affective dimensions of mother-daughter relations are affected by historically inflected social practices and power dynamics.[3]

Relying on Rich to articulate her understanding of the matrophobic Gothic of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a mode she sees as originating with Ann Radcliffe in the eighteenth century, Rogers also attempts to place a strong emphasis on the interface between psychological and social understandings of matrophobia. Rogers writes: "Daughters need nurturance but also need, in some degree, however empowering the mother-daughter connection may be, to differentiate themselves from the maternal body, which may be oppressed" (Rogers 2007, p. 7). Thus, "[a]mbivalence necessarily resides in the matrophobic equation" (Rogers 2007, p. 7). She finds that issues of identification between mothers and daughters in a broad context of oppression are central to the matrophobic Gothic and its legacy in twentieth-century popular culture. Rogers identifies a pattern of early female Gothic protagonists working through matrophobia to gain autonomy and, eventually, some type of reunification with an initially absent or ambivalent mother. Along the way the matrophobic Gothic heroine encounters surrogate mothers, largely ineffectual, and villains, as well as frightening, supernatural occurrences which, by the end of the work, are rationally explained, and the protagonist's fears are shown to be groundless, or at least to be grounded in explicable if frequently deplorable human actions.

As we will see, Hoffman's novel clearly reworks the uncanny concept of matrophobia, the daughter's dread of becoming the mother. However, the matrophobic pattern Rogers identifies as starting "with ostensible motherlessness and end[ing] full circle with maternal connection" (Rogers 2007, p. 39) is slightly altered in ways I suggest have to do with Hoffman's position as a writer of the postmemory generation and as a daughter of a survivor mother. In other words, the Holocaust is one historical event that has shaped intergenerational relations, and that strongly influences Hoffman's portrayal of mother–daughter relations in this work of Gothic science fiction. Placing this novel in the historical and cultural context of its production (which the genre of science fiction in some ways works to occlude) allows us to appreciate how Hoffman's work provides an additional historical dimension to Rich's and Roger's conceptions of matrophobia.

2. *The Secret*: Matrophobia, the Uncanny, and Postmemory

Rogers's pattern for the matrophobic Gothic is nearly inverted as the narrator of *The Secret* begins her story not with motherlessness and dread, but with an intense, even excessive maternal presence, and an insatiable desire for that presence. Iris explains that she grew up isolated with her mother in an old-fashioned house outside of Chicago, to which they moved after her mother gave up a successful career as an investment consultant in New York. The house and town become "her refuge, our hideaway," and the two keep "minimal social contacts" (Hoffman [2001] 2003, pp. 3–4). As Iris puts it: "My mother was sufficient for me; when I was with her I felt no other needs. Neither did she, apparently" (Hoffman [2001] 2003, p. 4). Her descriptions of her childhood, told to the reader but sometimes also to an "Adviser", a futuristic version of a psychoanalyst, are filled with images of womb-like enclosure. The child Iris thinks of her mother as "an enfolding, warm, comfy place" where "the heat and softness of her body enveloped me and absorbed whatever small unhappiness was inside me... until I felt dozy and fluid, like those amoebae under a microscope that maintain their amorphous shape for a moment and then merge with the organic surround" (Hoffman [2001] 2003, p. 6). Mother and daughter communicate without speaking, existing in their "own special atmosphere, as in a semi-liquid surround, an amniotic fluid that incorporated [them] both and within which there was a connecting passage or cord..." (Hoffman [2001] 2003, p. 16). In these and other descriptions, the intense physical intimacy with the mother and their isolation from the society around them contribute to the claustrophobic atmosphere and a growing sense of unnatural, uncanny kinship. We are reminded

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[3]   See O'Brien Hallstein (2010) for a discussion of the influence of matrophobia on feminist theory.

of Freud's observation on the etymology of the uncanny: "Thus *heimlich* is a word the meaning of which develops in the direction of ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, *unheimlich*" (Freud [1919] 1955, p. 225). Here, the uncanny results from an excess of the domestic familiar.

The discrepancy between reader awareness and the narrated character's awareness—in this case, of Iris's cloned status and the unusual and potentially threatening quality of the mother-daughter bond—is a feature of Gothic narrative which creates conditions for the uncanny as well as for irony. The narrative is indeed grounded in the interplay between the hidden and the obvious. For the young Iris, gazing at her mother means "looking at the very image of beauty, but also at an enlarging looking-glass, into which I entered through her eyes and in which I dissolved, becoming indistinguishable from her, becoming her" (Hoffman [2001] 2003, p. 6). This sense of mergence with her mother is pleasurable, though; what is frightening to Iris as a child is separation and objectification. She experiences this sometimes when her mother looks at her "as if I held some secret she was trying to unriddle, as if I were the mirror which could tell her things" (Hoffman [2001] 2003, p. 6). Uncomfortable feeling like "a precious object" of study to her mother, Iris regains her happiness when she can return her mother's gaze "and re-enter her eyes, [to] be together again" (Hoffman [2001] 2003, p. 7).[4] For Iris, this is natural, "the shared mother–me medium" (Hoffman [2001] 2003, p. 38). Iris's Adviser, by contrast, comments on such descriptions thus: "You're describing a pathological version of the mother-daughter bond... A relationship in which there isn't enough separation, so that the daughter gets submerged and lost" (Hoffman [2001] 2003, p. 38). His presence in the text occasions a disjunction between the narrating and narrated Iris, underscoring the retrospective nature of her narrative. His comment also humorously glosses Freudian psychology, for the pertinence of the comment is strongly undercut by the cloning situation. In this way, Hoffman's text brings ironic attention to what Andrea O'Reilly terms "the patriarchal narrative of the mother–daughter relationship" (qtd. in Stuart 2008, p. 47) which blames the mother for the child's difficulties, thus bringing the "blame-the-mother" narrative under scrutiny.[5]

Hoffman does however stage the possibility of blaming the mother for Iris's intense psychological struggle with her origins, her identity, her possibility for self-determination, and with the way these are intertwined. The cloning scenario amplifies the power of the mother, since cloning is her reproductive choice, and it accentuates the closeness and intensity of the mother–daughter relation, an intensity extra-textually associated with survivor mothers and their daughters. As one of the few analyses of this novel notes, the mother-daughter relation is "a form of attachment to which Hoffman is sensitive, being the post-war child of immigrant Holocaust survivors from Poland" (Marks 2010, p. 347).[6] Such a position also affects the discourse concerning mothers.

In an interview with Brenda Webster, Hoffman speaks about the importance of postmemory status to the writing of this novel and states that she was drawing on certain aspects of her relationship with her mother for *The Secret* (Webster 2003, p. 762). As we know from her other writing, especially from *After Such Knowledge,* both her parents were Jewish, and survived persecution in hiding, sometimes hiding in plain sight. Although victims of persecution, they were also survivors. Their parents, however, and most of their relatives were killed; both Eva and her sister Alina are named for murdered

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[4]   *The Secret* contains multiple intertextual references to children's stories, fairy tales, and fables. The looking-glass reference might be said to anchor this text in Lewis Carroll's fanciful bildungsroman, or even in Jacques Lacan's theories of development, but the reference to Snow White is deliberately developed throughout the text.

[5]   Susan Stuart claims that the Adviser functions "to normalize Iris's experience" (2008, p. 49), making it like that of any adolescent, and she draws attention to Iris's apparent acceptance of the Adviser's assessment at the end of the novel. Stuart argues that Hoffman adheres to this patriarchal view. While I agree that Hoffman shows a need for separations from the mother, I also find that the text insists upon Iris's greater understanding of her mother, including of her mother's exercise of agency within patriarchy. Hoffman herself claims that the Adviser is "vindicated" (Webster 2003, p. 766), and that psychoanalysis does provide insights into subjectivity, but Hoffman shows, here and in her other works, that history also affects subjectivity and individual relations.

[6]   Marks (2010) provides a rather negative assessment of Hoffman's "bioethical alarm" at the commodification and engineering of the human.

family members—a not uncommon practice in families of survivors. In the interview, Hoffman describes her relationship with her mother as "quite symbiotic" (Webster 2003, p. 762) and difficult to write about while her mother was alive. The intensity of their relationship, she suggests, was due in part to "being postwar" (Webster 2003, p. 762). Elaborating, she states: "These postwar children were so precious and had to replace so much" (Webster 2003, p. 763). Indeed, as scholars such as L. Anisfeld and A.D. Richards have noted, "a child born to Holocaust survivors replaces not simply a specific dead child or ancestor, but all those who have perished" (qtd in Schwab 2012, p. 86). Though Hoffman does not spell it out here, in *After Such Knowledge* she writes about second-generation children feeling required "to perform impossible psychic tasks: to replace dead relatives, or children who have perished; to heal and repair the parents; above all, to rescue the parents" (Hoffman 2005, p. 63). She notes her personal feeling of "a somber, though honorific, mantle being draped round my shoulders" (Hoffman 2005, p. 65) when she learns she was named for her two murdered grandmothers. Second-generation writers have attested that a weighty sense of duty or responsibility may result from this situation, as well as difficulties accepting or rejecting expectations that may seem to arise not just from individual parents, but from history itself.[7]

The interview does make clear that Hoffman sees her status as a child of Holocaust survivors as affecting her characterization of the mother and daughter in this novel.[8] Other women writers of the postmemory generation, such as Lisa Appignanesi, Helen Fremont, or Anne Karpf, have, like Hoffman, written about intergenerational relations in memoirs and autobiographies. "[I]n the accounts of Holocaust victims and survivors," one critic writes, "bonds between mothers and daughters function... as symbols of life, hope, tradition, and continuity, as well as containing a measure of rupture and devastation" (Bergen 2013, p. 28). Frederica K. Clementi's (2013) study offers another view; she examines what she calls the "compulsory enmity" (2013, p. 14) between Holocaust mothers and daughters and the need for daughters to attain autonomy by committing symbolic "matricide" in a relational dynamic that follows what psychoanalysis would consider the normal path of individuation. Dealing with relations between postmemory writers and their mothers, Clementi emphasizes the pathologies of survivor mothers and their daughters' need both to break free from them, but also to admit and expose the cultural denigration of mothers.[9] But *The Secret* is quite unique in transmuting this theme to Gothic science fiction. In fact, I would argue, Hoffman's understanding of a daughter's uncanny relation to Holocaust history through the figure of a mother who is always both victim and survivor, powerless and powerful, leads her to mobilize the matrophobic Gothic and the uncanny figure of the clone.

In her oeuvre, Hoffman frequently characterizes the experiences of the postgeneration, in Gothic terms, as uncanny. For example, in *Shtetl*, Hoffman characterizes the post-war discovery of buried Jewish artefacts as "uncanny" (Hoffman 1999, p. 25), because the Jewish presence was once familiar but, since the mass murders of the war, had become virtually unknown. *After Such Knowledge* connects the postmemory generation with an uncanny identification with the dead (Hoffman 2005, p. 65), and, of more relevance here, with unconscious absorption of parental moods, feelings, half-formed thoughts or telling silences, all conditioned by the Holocaust and attested to by numerous women writers of the postmemory generation.[10] Hoffman writes: "The process [of the unconscious mind symbolically

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7　For example, in *The War After*, Anne Karpf writes about her mother's initial disapproving response to her non-Jewish boyfriend: " . . . I was doing what Hitler hadn't managed to—finishing off the Jewish race" (Karpf [1996] 2008, p. 97). Her parents eventually accepted her choice of partner with the birth of the couple's child.

8　Hoffman also takes up her status as an immigrant: "Immigration made me see that I was the person I was because I grew up in certain circumstances... and that I could be a completely different person if I were determined by other circumstances and culture. That is, I understood that to some extent I was constructed and that led to a great deal of self-alienation or detachment" (Webster 2003, p. 769).

9　See (Anne Karpf [1996] 2008, pp. 220–45) for a discussion of the psychological literature on the second generation, up through the 1990s. She notes a tendency to pathologize survivor parents and their children, and to neglect the love many of these children felt.

10　Examples are *Losing the Dead* (Appignanesi 2013), *The War After* (Karpf [1996] 2008), and *After Long Silence* (Fremont 1999).

processing such moods and feelings] can give the impression of an almost literal haunting, a notion that recurs often in writing about the intergenerational transmission of trauma. Something reemerges from the past that we thought had been dead... but that has lain dormant in the turrets and caverns of the soul till it returns in the form of specters and shadows" (Hoffman 2005, p. 65). She connects this with gothic fantasy and distortion, rather than actual memory. Yet, she explains, "this is exactly the crux of the second generation's difficulty: that it has inherited not experiences, but its shadows. The uncanny, in Freud's formulation, is the sensation of something that is both very alien and deeply familiar, something that only the unconscious knows. If so, then the second generation has grown up with the uncanny" (Hoffman 2005, p. 66).[11] Hoffman's highly literary style, her numerous allusions to Gothic fiction, and her frequent nods to Freudian psychology clearly reveal her familiarity with Gothic and psychoanalytic discourses and their conceptions of mother–daughter relations.

Freud's 1919 formulation of the uncanny also grew out of wartime experience; it reflects his "disjointed experience of being in the world in the wake of World War I and the fall of the Habsburg empire" (Schlipphacke 2015, p. 164). Heidi Schlipphacke argues that Freud not only offers the depth model of the uncanny, familiar as the return of the repressed, but that his essay also offers hints of a horizontal or surface model for uncanny emotions in its presentation of examples of doubling, substitution, and the coincidence of opposites that "flatten" differences and "blur" boundaries—the "signature mode of the uncanny" (Schlipphacke 2015, p. 170). In her reading of Freud, the uncanny is not or not only a result of trauma in the past, but it can also "be a product purely of the present, an affective experience that emerges, as it were, out of nothing... " (Schlipphacke 2015, p. 169). This fits with the experience of second-generation writers, whose imagination of the past, always taking place in the present, contributes to their affective experiences of the uncanny, the sense of in-betweenness, of being in between the past and the present, the self and the other, memory and imagination or projection. As Schlipphacke puts it: "Opposites collapse into one another; boundaries are blurred. Here, as in the examples of the doppelgänger, ambivalence is key, the slippage between self and other" (Schlipphacke 2015, p. 166).

The mother/daughter clone partakes of this same ambivalence, and engenders confusion and tension in human relations, particularly family relations. As Iris grows older, her physical resemblance to her mother is enhanced to the extent that they appear eerily identical, and when Iris learns that she is her mother's clone, she is also forced to recognize her mother as her twin. Indeed, as Verena Stolcke observes, clones are identical twins separated by time (Stolcke 2012, p. 34). Cloning disrupts human genealogy, queering both generational and kinship relations. Genetically, Iris's grandmother is her mother, and in her grandfather, she gains the father she never had. Her aunt Janey becomes her sister, at the same time as she functions as a sort of surrogate mother for Iris. Having sex with her mother's lover is both incestuous, and not; like all categories of relations, her relationship with Steven, too, becomes improper, not one thing but two, and neither one nor the other of the two.[12]

Iris's discovery that her mother cloned her initially removes her mother from the pale of understanding and unleashes a crisis in identity. Is Iris human, or a monster? Feeling "permeated by a nearly unspeakable recognition [that she] was a replica, an artificial mechanism, a manufactured thing" (Hoffman [2001] 2003, p. 61), Iris notes the paradox that: "No greater degree of aloneness was possible than that which came to me with the revelation that I was my mother's exact double. The person who was my closest kindred, to whom I most wanted to turn to in this cruel dilemma, was the source of the

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[11] Growing up with the uncanny may be due to the silences and secrets frequently surrounding Holocaust history: "in many families, the secret past became even more of a secret..." (Hoffman 2005, p. 94). In *The Secret* the silences surrounding Iris's absence of a father and the uncanny resemblance between mother and daughter generate rumors in school, and Iris imagines these to be Gothic tales about "incest, murder, felony" (Hoffman [2001] 2003, p. 93) in which she "was the fruit of an incestuous union between my mother and her twin brother; that my mother had murdered my father—because he was also her father; that my mother snatched me away from her twin sister..." (Hoffman [2001] 2003, p. 40).

[12] Hoffman writes: " . . . he nearly was [my father]. Which made me the girl who had nearly killed her mother and had slept with her almost father" (Hoffman [2001] 2003, p. 188).

horror I'd turned into" (Hoffman [2001] 2003, p. 62). In imagery that inverts the usual relation between original and copy, between self and double, between mother and child, Iris, compelled to abandon her mother in search of her own identity, instead finds her mother's image inside her, "a foetal mother, clinging incubus", making Iris want to cut herself in two, rip herself open: "To evacuate myself from my body, to cancel myself like an aborted experiment" (Hoffman [2001] 2003, p. 123). The language and imagery here resonate with Rich's "womanly splitting of the self" in matrophobia.

For Rich, writing in the age of second-wave feminism, matrophobia entails "the desire to become purged once and for all of our mother's bondage, to become individuated and free. The mother stands for the victim in ourselves, the unfree woman, the martyr. Our personalities seem dangerously to blur and overlap with our mothers'; and, in a desperate attempt to know where mother ends and daughter begins, we perform radical surgery" (Rich [1976] 1995, p. 236). In *The Secret*, Iris views her mother as strong, not weak, and an agent or actor rather than a victim. Iris nevertheless feels she must break free from her mother, and she eventually attempts to do so by violently attacking her. In a revision of *Frankenstein*, the monster Iris attempts to strangle her creatrix mother, appropriately named Elizabeth, like Frankenstein's fiancée.[13] Although Iris attempts to strangle Elizabeth, she finally releases her because she feels how her mother resigns herself to death rather than harm her child. At this turning point in the novel, Elizabeth understands the effect of her actions, "that she had made a monster" (Hoffman [2001] 2003, p. 165), and Iris feels, as she states, "something like sorrow; for her, as she was keening our dreadful common plight, for the fate she had given me, which she'd now have to suffer as if it were her own" (Hoffman [2001] 2003, p. 167). The scene of violent separation followed by some form of mutual recognition does not lead to a reunion between the two, as Roger's matrophobic Gothic might suggest, but it does inaugurate a significant change in perspective among the characters and arguably in readers.

Hoffman's book is unusual in making the narrator of the text a clone. Horror and the uncanny are usually experiences reserved for the original, not the copy. Hoffman's choice of point of view means that the cloned life is depicted "as an imagined and embedded social and psychological experience" (Marks 2010, p. 333). The empathy this narrative perspective engenders for Iris, however, is finally extended to Elizabeth as well, for with this scene, Iris begins to move from blaming the mother to understanding her, and vice versa. Though Iris first casts Elizabeth's motivations as narcissistic—a characterization which also resonates with Hoffman's published remarks about her mother's egoism (Hoffman [1989] 1998, pp. 15–16)—she develops a more accurate understanding in the sporadic meetings the two women have in the later years.

Elizabeth's sister, Janey, lays the groundwork for this understanding by telling Iris not only about Elizabeth's great beauty and "personal genius" (Hoffman [2001] 2003, p. 202), but also about her extreme pride and self-confidence. Janey describes Elizabeth as gradually understanding that she is unsuccessful in intimate relationships, and Janey believes that she and their mother had had a serious disagreement. She tells Iris that "neither of us seemed to be having children. That made Mom very unhappy and I think she said something to Liz…" (Hoffman [2001] 2003, p. 213).[14] Elizabeth confirms much of this in a long talk she has with Iris after their physical confrontation and subsequent separation. Elizabeth has "dimmed" (Hoffman [2001] 2003, p. 218), looking "almost haunted" (Hoffman [2001] 2003, p. 226), and Iris realizes with some shock that her mother can age. Attempting to explain her choices to Iris, Elizabeth describes something like a mid-life crisis: her powerful need to succeed and to have more and more, and her growing sense of failure at relationships, her inability to conceive a child, the disappointment she felt she caused her parents, her feeling of being lost, and finally her desire for a child in any way possible. Elizabeth is also candid about the ambivalence of her own feelings for her daughterly double—her revulsion at their similarity, grounded

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[13] Iris is also compared to Jekyll and Hyde (Hoffman [2001] 2003, p. 125), Echo (Hoffman [2001] 2003, p. 171), and the Golem of Jewish lore (Hoffman [2001] 2003, pp. 125, 165).

[14] Janey, Iris's aunt/sister, is clearly one of the surrogate mothers of the type Rogers finds in the plots of matrophobic Gothics.

in self-doubt, her hatred for the youthful body mocking her aging one—but also, as Iris hears, for her intense love for her child: "I've loved you. Loved you as myself and almost beyond myself. We've loved each other, haven't we? Let us not forget that" (Hoffman [2001] 2003, p. 228). Elizabeth finally apologizes to Iris for giving her "a difficult fate" (Hoffman [2001] 2003, p. 222) and, by separating from her, frees her to discover and pursue her own desires. Elizabeth sees this, finally, as the proper role of the mother (Hoffman [2001] 2003, p. 227).

Elizabeth's struggles are in many ways typical of women struggling to find purpose in a patriarchal world. She feels the pressure of expectations to form a heterosexual partnership and reproduce, and she blames herself for failed relationships. The apparent normality of Elizabeth's crisis also takes a familiar path toward resolution, in having a baby. Later, when Iris joins a group of other clones, she discovers that most of them are female: " . . . the reasons were so obvious that they made me shudder" (Hoffman [2001] 2003, p. 205).[15] Janey, too, speculates that while women of her generation had found satisfaction in exerting a newfound power over their lives, the men had lost their sense of adventure, until they began "mucking about with life, with creation" (Hoffman [2001] 2003, p. 225), through cloning. In other words, Hoffman shows Elizabeth to be an agent but one whose choices are circumscribed by patriarchy and its desire to control human reproduction, as is her relationship to her daughter. The matrophobic gothic pattern is affirmed with Iris's understanding of her mother's gendered form of vulnerability.

3. Conclusions: Mothers and Daughters in Postmemory Writing

As a postmemory writer, Hoffman brings to her portrait of the mother a special understanding of the way mothers are both victims and agents. Hoffman writes about her own mother as being somehow "breakable" but also as possessing "the knowledge of the powerless," including the ability to see through pretense and to understand what lies beneath it (Hoffman [1989] 1998, p. 269). I would suggest that it is the intimate understanding of how motherhood, daughterhood, and intergenerational relations are determined in part by Holocaust history which assist Hoffman in exposing the matrophobia stoked by patriarchy and in attempting to go beyond it. Narratives by second-generation women writers overwhelmingly suggest that, as victims of Nazi persecution, mothers cannot be easily repudiated, for to do so would risk dishonoring the mothers' survival and, perhaps, Holocaust history. Instead, writers such as Hoffman seek to understand their maternal connections, in all their ambivalence and complexity. Thus, Holocaust history is one determinant of the matrophobic equation among children of survivors, affecting daughterly identification with and understanding of their mothers.

With this in mind, it is interesting to reconsider the fear of bondage at the heart of matrophobia, and to revisit Hoffman's image of the cord. At the end of the novel Iris emphasizes her mother's separation from her, but also her continued importance: "I remembered the cord, the corridor along which the milk of love flowed from her to me, making me languid and sleepy when I was a child. That cord had once almost strangled me, and yet maybe it was the channel along which love would always travel" (Hoffman [2001] 2003, p. 262). This duality and ambivalence cannot finally be resolved, but can with difficulty be affirmed, as a connective tissue joining generations. As Marianne Hirsch notes, postmemory can take many forms (Hirsch 1997, p. 243). Hoffman's insights into intergenerational bonds influenced by Holocaust history, and her willingness to explore these after her mother's death, lead her to produce a matrophobic narrative of gothic science fiction, appropriating the form to accommodate the demands of a tragic history.

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[15] The one explicit reference to the Holocaust occurs when Iris attends clone meetings, and finds that they are compared to Jews, but also to Nazis and Christians (Hoffman [2001] 2003, p. 191).

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