

anxiety of authorship.⁷⁹ The argument is that nineteenth century women authors tell the truth but 'tell it slant,' concealing deeper, less acceptable levels of meaning, thus 'simultaneously conforming to and subverting patriarchal literary standards.'⁸⁰ This impressive study is ultimately flawed as author and character are conflated, the madwoman taken to be 'the *author's* double, an image of her own anxiety and rage.'⁸¹ Yet, in spite of this and in spite of Gilbert and Gubar's focusing on identifying hidden plots in the works they study, *The Madwoman in the Attic* pinpoints textual strategies related to the expression of women's revolt against patriarchy in nineteenth century fiction that can also be traced in Beauvoir's fiction. I shall read textual strategies such as the use of parody and irony and the subversion of the conventions of language, as the stamp of madness on a textual level.

This study is not intended to provide readings of all Beauvoir's fiction. The following four chapters explore the nature and extent of textual excess and transgression in the novels and short stories published at paradigmatic moments in the evolution of Beauvoir's fiction between 1943 and 1967. The novels *L'Invitée*, *Les Mandarins*, and *Les Belles Images* and the short story collection *La Femme rompue* are among Beauvoir's most interesting and most challenging books.

My readings of Beauvoir are based on close textual analysis to show how madness is enacted in the text. Autobiographical and philosophical matters, whilst they form the context of my analyses, will not, in the main, be directly addressed here. My study interrogates the text itself and seeks to be as little distracted from that examination as possible.

My starting point is Beauvoir's first published novel and the symbolic universe she creates there.

⁷⁹ Gilbert and Gubar's ideas on women's creativity and the use of images of enclosure are related to 'La Femme rompue' by Phil Powrie in 'Rereading Between the Lines: A Postscript on *La Femme rompue*,' *Modern Language Review*, 87, 1992, 320–29.

⁸⁰ Gilbert and Gubar, p. 73.

⁸¹ Gilbert and Gubar, p. 78. For a detailed evaluation of *The Madwoman in the Attic*, see Moi, *Sexual Textual Politics*, pp. 57–69. *The Madwoman in the Attic* is discussed in relation to Beauvoir in Fallaize, *The Novels*, p. 179.

Chapter 1

L'Invitée

L'Invitée is a highly figurative text. In this chapter I examine the symbolic universe that Beauvoir creates in her first published novel. The term *symbolic universe* refers to more than the sum of the images in the text; it is also the network of repeated key images, words, and motifs that accumulate in the text, contributing to the atmosphere of the text.

The symbolic universe of *L'Invitée* is Gothic. This may be a surprising assertion considering that this text has been read, for the most part, as a realist, philosophical, autobiographical novel. Indeed, this reading has authorial authority. In *La Force de l'âge*, Beauvoir discusses her first novel at length, describing how the real life trio, Jean-Paul Sartre, Olga Kosakievicz (to whom the novel is dedicated), and herself, was transposed into fiction (FA, pp. 384–93). Beauvoir placed herself at the heart of her novel in the character of Françoise (FA, p. 347). She also writes about the form of *L'Invitée* and acknowledges a debt to certain American writers of that time, notably to Dashiell Hammett and to Hemingway, as well as to Dostoyevsky and Agatha Christie.¹ She places emphasis on the realism she set out to achieve:

Dans les passages réussis du roman, on arrive à une ambiguïté de significations qui correspond à celle qu'on rencontre dans la réalité. Je voulais aussi que les faits ne s'enchaînent pas selon les rapports univoques de causalité, mais qu'ils soient à la fois, comme dans la vie même, compréhensibles et contingents. (FA, p. 391)

In the novel's more successful sequences I achieved an ambiguity of meanings corresponding to the kind of thing one meets in real life. I also tried to ensure that events I described should not develop in terms of some cut-and-dried causal pattern, but should be, just as in real life, simultaneously comprehensible and contingent. (PL, p. 344, ta)

This is not to suggest that Beauvoir belonged to the nineteenth-century realist tradition. In an interview with Jill M. Wharfe, Beauvoir clarified her approach to realism/reality: 'Je ne dis pas que je suis un écrivain réaliste. Je suis un écrivain qui a essayé de rendre compte un peu de la réalité'; 'I am not saying that I am a realist writer. I am a writer who has tried in a small way to give an account of reality' (my translation).² Her notion of reality was, of course, quite different from nineteenth-century notions of reality. As Françoise Arnaud Hibbs expresses it, Beauvoir's was

¹ The influence that American writers had on Beauvoir is discussed in Anne-Marie Celeux, *Jean-Paul Sartre, Beauvoir: Une expérience commune, deux écritures*, Paris: Librairie Nizet, 1976. Toril Moi explores the contradictions inherent in Beauvoir's use of the thriller and detective story models in *Simone de Beauvoir*, p. 100.

² Wharfe, Jill M., 'Perfect Interlocutors: Intertextuality and Divergence in the Fiction of Beauvoir and Sartre' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Birmingham, 1988).

a 'subjective realism.'³ Lorna Sage describes her as a writer of 'realist novels that put reality in quotation marks.'⁴

Judith Okely's reading of *L'Invitée* is autobiographical and psychoanalytical, exploring the transposition of Beauvoir's life into the novel and providing psychoanalytical interpretations of both.⁵ Elizabeth Fallaize highlights the autobiographical nature of the psychological crisis in *L'Invitée* and also directs our attention to the way Beauvoir seems to advocate a philosophical reading of the novel by placing a quotation from Hegel as its epigraph: 'Chaque conscience poursuit la mort de l'autre' ('Each consciousness seeks the death of the other').⁶ Emphasis in Renée Winegarten's reading of *L'Invitée* also falls on autobiographical and philosophical aspects of the work.⁷ Toril Moi's reading of *L'Invitée* as a modern melodrama is closer to my own.⁸ Indeed, melodrama and the Gothic share a number of characteristics, notably, excess. Although the emphasis in her reading remains philosophical and psychoanalytical, Toril Moi examines the imagery associated with Xavière and the threat she represents and she identifies what she refers to as 'a kind of luridly gothic imagination.'⁹ It is this area that my reading explores and develops. It is my contention that this realist, philosophical novel is embedded in a Gothic universe that Beauvoir created in order to confront pain and madness, to express that darker side of herself. A close reading of the text reveals the extent to which she had recourse to Gothic conventions and figures, which makes it justifiable to speak of the Gothic economy of the text.¹⁰

Interview with Beauvoir: Paris, 6 July 1985, Appendix 1, p. 344. I gratefully acknowledge permission to quote from this interview.

³ Hibbs, p. 10.

⁴ Lorna Sage, *Women in the House of Fiction: Post-War Women Novelists*, London: Macmillan, 1992, p. viii.

⁵ Okely, pp. 139–40.

⁶ Fallaize, *The Novels*, p. 26. Unfortunately, the epigraph is missing from the English translation.

⁷ Winegarten, pp. 101–6.

⁸ Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir*, pp. 95–124.

⁹ Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir*, p. 97. Note Moi's use of a small 'g' rather than a capital for the term *gothic*.

¹⁰ Beauvoir's correspondence with Jean-Paul Sartre reveals that she was reading M.G. Lewis's *The Monk* (1795), a quintessential Gothic novel, at the time she was writing *L'Invitée*. Letter of Saturday, 16 December 1939 in *Beauvoir: Lettres à Sartre, 1930–1939*, ed. Sylvie le Bon de Beauvoir, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1990) I, 356 (no. 125). Beauvoir notes in this letter that she is reading Antonin Artaud's version of *The Monk*. This is neither a translation nor an adaptation but 'une sorte de "copie" en français du texte anglais original.' Antonin Artaud, "Le Moine" de Lewis raconté par Antonin Artaud (1931), in Artaud, *Oeuvres complètes*, 18 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1956–), vol. VI (1966), 'Avertissement', p. 13. Artaud cut the original and intensified 'la violence et l'atrocité du récit' (Notes, p. 417). Interesting echoes link *L'Invitée* and *The Monk/Le Moine*. For example, in the first chapter of *The Monk*, an ageless gypsy woman who sings and dances tells the fortune of the

The object here is to explore the insights to be gained from looking again at *L'Invitée* through the lens that the Gothic provides.¹¹ In the introduction to his book on the Gothic, Fred Botting tells us that it is impossible to define a fixed set of Gothic conventions; for him the Gothic is a hybrid form incorporating and transforming other literary forms and developing and changing its own conventions in relation to newer modes of writing (p. 14). The aim Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick sets out in the introduction to *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* is instructive. She writes:

I want to make it easier for the reader of 'respectable' nineteenth-century [we might add 'and twentieth-century'] novels to write 'Gothic' in the margin next to certain especially interesting passages, and to make that notation with a sense of linking specific elements in the passage with specific elements in the constellation of Gothic conventions. (*The Coherence of Gothic Conventions*, p. 2)

What then does the term Gothic mean? What elements might go to make up 'the constellation of Gothic conventions,' albeit unfixed, that can be identified in *L'Invitée*? In the Gothic mode, feeling and emotion exceed reason. Ambivalence and ambiguity prevail, and suspense and uncertainty are fostered. Typically, Gothic texts are concerned with the nature of language, its limits and its power, and they are characterised by a concomitant fear of representation.¹² Gothic texts tend to be preoccupied with madness, identity, and the dissolution of the self. In Gothic novels images of enclosure and weight coexist with images of space and vertigo, and this is also true of *L'Invitée*. Magic and the supernatural also figure prominently in Gothic texts. The cruel passions and supernatural terror of the first Gothic novels and the characteristically obsessive, gloomy, violent, doom-laden, and terrifying atmosphere of later Gothic works find an echo in *L'Invitée*, where a corresponding threat of irrational and evil forces looms over everything. The bestial within the human is a characteristic Gothic theme and sexuality a central concern. In Gothic texts sexuality tends to be distorted, and emphasis is commonly laid on incest and eroticism. Uncertainties about sexuality are regularly linked to wider

heroine (*The Monk*, pp. 34–9, *Le Moine*, pp. 48–52). Throughout the novel, details call to mind *L'Invitée*. In terms of tone, the two texts are congruous. It is interesting to recall that Foucault considered that Artaud's writing exemplified the tragic consciousness of madness. See Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*, Paris: Gallimard, 1972, p. 40. (Section omitted from the English translation.)

¹¹ Three main sources have been referred to: Fred Botting, *Gothic*, London: Routledge, 1996; Elizabeth MacAndrew, *The Gothic Tradition in Fiction*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1979; Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions*, Revised Edition, New York: Arno Press, 1980.

¹² The unspeakable is quintessential Gothic; sometimes the term is used simply to mean awesome, whilst sometimes, according to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, it implies 'a range of reflections on language,' whilst at other times it may be enacted in text as characters contend with the despair of the uncommunicable. Sedgwick, p. 3.

threats of disintegration.¹³ Some of the figures that populate Gothic landscapes as the embodiment of real or imagined threats are also found in the pages of Beauvoir's novel: demons, corpses, fainting heroines, monks and nuns, the mad.¹⁴ The favourite Gothic themes of live burial and tombs are prominent too, as are mirrors, a stock Gothic device, generally signifying alienation.

The uncanny is one of the essential ingredients of the Gothic. At the beginning of his essay on the uncanny, Freud tells us that 'the uncanny is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar.'¹⁵ He refines this definition and determines that the uncanny is 'something repressed which recurs' (p. 241). As we shall see, this notion can help elucidate the nature of the danger that threatens Françoise.

An 'over-abundance of imaginative frenzy, untamed by reason' and a style characterised by boundlessness and over-ornamentation have been interpreted as signs of transgression in the Gothic.¹⁶ It is precisely in the expression of the inexpressible and the excesses of the Gothic mode that I locate the madness in the text of *L'Invitée*. Insofar as it is Gothic and thus transgressive, the text of *L'Invitée* is mad; it enacts madness.¹⁷

'Gothic signifies a writing of excess.'¹⁸ These are the first words in Fred Botting's book, signaling how central this notion is to the Gothic. Much of the writing in *L'Invitée* is, as we shall see, excessive, hyperbolic, extravagant; it is Gothic writing to the extent that it is more likely to evoke emotion and work on readers' feelings than it is to prompt an intellectual response or rational argument. It is useful to begin this exploration of the Gothic in *L'Invitée* with a number of key passages that, in particular, epitomise Gothic writing, a writing of excess. A close reading of these passages highlights a dense network of words and motifs that are found throughout the text and that go to make up what I have referred to as the Gothic economy of the text. These words and motifs are analysed in detail subsequently.¹⁹ What is of interest here is the quality of the writing that makes it justifiable to speak of its excess.

¹³ Botting, p. 5.

¹⁴ In *L'Invitée* there is a whole cast of other minor Gothic figures including ghosts (pp. 147, 179, 359) and puppets, also associated with death (pp. 153, 179, 335). Françoise is described as 'une vieille machine déréglée,' I, p. 434 ('an old, broken down machine,' SCS, p. 351). Paule dances 'la danse des machines,' I, pp. 182–3 ('the dance of the machines', SCS, p. 145).

¹⁵ 'The Uncanny,' *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol XVII (1917–1919), ed. James Strachey, London: The Hogarth Press, 1955, pp. 218–52 (p. 220).

¹⁶ Botting, pp. 5–6.

¹⁷ Foucault discusses the links between unreason, internment and what he terms 'la littérature fantastique de folie et d'horreur' that appeared in the nineteenth century. See *Histoire de la folie*, 'La Grande Peur', pp. 375–82; *Madness and Civilisation*, 'The Great Fear', pp. 191–200.

¹⁸ Botting, p. 1.

¹⁹ The first key passage can be found on pp. 354–5 of *L'Invitée*. The second key passage is on pp. 362–4. The third key passage is on pp. 499–501.

These highly coloured, extravagant passages occur at climactic points in the narrative. The first passage relates the incident in the nightclub when Xavière deliberately and repeatedly burns herself with a cigarette during a dance performance:

Xavière ne regardait plus, elle avait baissé la tête, elle tenait dans sa main droite une cigarette à demi consumée et elle l'approchait lentement de sa main gauche. Françoise eut peine à réprimer un cri; Xavière appliquait le tison rouge contre sa peau et un sourire aigu retroussait ses lèvres. (I, p. 354)

Xavière was no longer watching, her head was lowered. In her right hand she held a half-smoked cigarette which she was slowly moving towards her left hand. Françoise barely repressed a scream. Xavière was pressing the glowing brand against her skin with a bitter smile curling her lips. (SCS, p. 284)

Françoise then watches in horror as Xavière burns herself again: '[...] Xavière soufflait délicatement sur les cendres qui recouvraient sa brûlure; quand elle eut dispersé ce petit matelas protecteur, elle colla de nouveau contre la plaie mise à nu le bout embrasé de sa cigarette' (I, p. 354); '[...] Xavière was gently blowing the ash which covered her burn. When she had blown away this little protective layer, she once more pressed the glowing end of her cigarette against the exposed wound' (SCS, p. 284, ta). Françoise's crisis, which is a metaphysical one,²⁰ is related not in cool, rational prose but rather in hyperbolic terms: 'Françoise eut un haut-le-corps; ce n'était pas seulement sa chair qui se révoltait; elle se sentait atteinte d'une façon plus profonde et plus irrémédiable, jusqu'au cœur de son être. Derrière ce rictus maniaque, un danger menaçait, plus définitif que tous ceux qu'elle avait jamais imaginés' (I, p. 354); 'Françoise flinched; not only did her flesh rise up in revolt; she was affected more deeply and more irrevocably to the very core of her being. Behind that maniacal grin, was the threat of a danger more positive than any she had ever imagined' (SCS, pp. 284–5, ta). Ambiguity is fostered. The danger is at once the most absolute and indeterminate.

The second key passage that exemplifies excess is, in many ways, a continuation of the previous one that had been interrupted.²¹ During the rendering of a Spanish poem, Xavière is as if in a trance and Françoise suffers another access of panic:

Xavière ne regardait plus la femme, elle fixait le vide; une cigarette se consumait entre ses doigts et la braise commençait à atteindre sa chair sans qu'elle parût s'en apercevoir; elle semblait plongée dans une extase hystérique. Françoise

²⁰ See pp. 375–6, where Françoise discusses her crisis with Pierre. In her relationship with Xavière, Françoise has been confronted with the reality that other consciousnesses exist in the world besides her own.

²¹ Moi suggests that Xavière deliberately burns herself on two occasions and that it is 'when Xavière tries to burn herself for the second time' that Françoise reacts vehemently (*Simone de Beauvoir*, p. 115). In fact, during the rendering of the Spanish poem, Xavière seems to be in a kind of hysterical trance, and a lit cigarette between her fingers has burnt down and begins to scorch her flesh. Françoise's reaction is due to her recollection of the previous incident in a charged atmosphere. See I, p. 363.

passa la main sur son front; elle était en sueur, l'atmosphère était étouffante et au-dedans d'elle-même, ses pensées brûlaient comme des flammes. Cette présence ennemie qui s'était révélée tout à l'heure dans un sourire de folle devenait de plus en plus proche, il n'y avait plus moyen d'en éviter le dévoilement terrifiant; jour après jour, minute après minute, Françoise avait fui le danger, mais c'en était fait, elle l'avait enfin rencontré cet infranchissable obstacle qu'elle avait pressenti sous des formes incertaines depuis sa plus petite enfance; à travers la jouissance maniaque de Xavière, à travers sa haine et sa jalousie, le scandale éclatait, aussi monstrueux, aussi définitif que la mort; en face de Françoise, et cependant sans elle, quelque chose existait comme une condamnation sans recours: libre, absolu, irréductible, une conscience étrangère se dressait. (I, pp. 363–4)

Xavière was no longer watching the woman, she was staring into space; a cigarette was alight between her fingers and the glowing end was beginning to touch her flesh without her seeming to be aware of it; she seemed to be in the grip of hysterical ecstasy. Françoise passed her hand across her forehead; she was dripping with perspiration, the atmosphere was stifling and deep down her thoughts were burning like flames. The hostile presence, which earlier had betrayed itself in a lunatic's smile, was getting closer and closer, there was now no way of avoiding its terrifying disclosure; day after day, minute after minute, Françoise had fled the danger, but now it had happened, she had at last come face to face with the insurmountable obstacle which she had sensed in a shadowy form since her earliest childhood; through Xavière's maniacal pleasure, through her hatred and her jealousy, the abomination was being revealed, as monstrous, as definitive as death; facing Françoise, and yet without her, something existed like a sentence without an appeal: free, absolute, implacable, there stood an alien consciousness. (SCS, pp. 291–2, ta)

Again, one is struck by the heightened and intense tone of the text. Readers of *L'Invitée*, like readers of Gothic romance, are placed in a state of suspense and uncertainty.²² The text builds to a crescendo; words are piled on words, clause upon clause in a long sentence (nine lines, 113 words) that seems to draw readers into the text, enacting the weight of language and reproducing Françoise's feelings of suffocation. Together, these passages represent one of the climaxes in the novel. It is at this point that Françoise realises that Xavière is a threat, not only to her happiness but to her very existence.

The final key passage I consider is the culmination of the text that is reached as Françoise comes to the decision that Xavière must die. This passage, too, is characterised by hyperbole:

[Françoise] traversa le couloir, elle titubait comme une aveugle, les larmes brûlaient ses yeux: 'J'ai été jalouse d'elle. Je lui ai pris Gerbert.' Les larmes brûlaient, les mots brûlaient comme un fer rouge. Elle s'assit au bord du divan et répéta hébétée: 'J'ai fait cela. C'est moi.' Dans les ténèbres, le visage de Gerbert brûlait d'un feu noir, et les lettres sur le tapis étaient noires comme un pacte infernal. Elle porta son mouchoir à ses lèvres. Une lave noire et torride coulait dans ses veines. Elle aurait voulu mourir. (I, p. 499)

²² See Maggie Kilgour, *The Rise of the Gothic Novel*, London: Routledge, 1995, p. 6.

[Françoise] crossed the passage, she was staggering as though blind, tears burned her eyes: 'I was jealous of her. I took Gerbert from her.' The tears burned, the words burned like a red hot iron. She sat on the edge of the bed and stupified repeated: 'I did that. It's me.' In the shadows, black flames flickered round Gerbert's face, and the letters scattered on the carpet were as black as an infernal pact. She put her handkerchief to her mouth. A black, torrid lava was coursing in her veins. She wanted to die. (SCS, p. 406, ta)

A succession of short and asyntactic sentences convey Françoise's distress; their rhythm could almost be the rhythm of broken sobs. Repetition adds to the intensity of the text: 'brûler,' 'larmes,' 'noir.' The same motifs are found again a few lines later: 'Elle ferma les yeux. Les larmes coulaient, la lave brûlante coulait et consumait le coeur' (I, p. 500); 'She closed her eyes. Her tears were flowing, the burning lava was flowing and consuming her heart' (SCS, p. 406, ta). Françoise has finally come face to face with the threat to her being: 'Elle était tombée dans le piège, elle était à la merci de cette conscience vorace qui avait attendu dans l'ombre le moment de l'engloutir' (I, p. 500); 'She had fallen into the trap, she was at the mercy of this voracious consciousness that had been waiting in the shadows for the moment to swallow her up' (SCS, p. 406, ta). This writing relies on hyperbole for its impact.

In each case, the relating of these three incidents gives rise to a meta-commentary on language. Excess results from language coming up against the inexpressable. What is threatening Françoise is beyond language, beyond thought even: 'On ne pouvait pas s'en approcher même en pensée, au moment où elle touchait au but, la pensée se dissolvait; ce n'était aucun objet saisissable, c'était un incessant jaillissement et une fuite incessante, transparente pour soi seule et à jamais impénétrable' (I, pp. 354–5); 'Approach to it was impossible even in thought, just when she seemed to be getting near it, the thought dissolved; it was not a tangible object, it was an incessant flux and an incessant flight, transparent only to itself and forever impenetrable' (SCS, p. 285, ta). Only contradiction, language pushed to the limit of meaningfulness, can begin to express the nature of the threat:

C'était comme la mort, une totale négation, une éternelle absence, et cependant par une contradiction bouleversante, ce gouffre de néant pouvait se rendre présent à soi-même et se faire exister pour soi avec plénitude; l'univers tout entier s'engloutissait en lui, et Françoise, à jamais dépossédée du monde, se dissolvait elle-même dans ce vide dont aucun mot, aucune image ne pouvait cerner le contour infini. (I, p. 364)²³

²³ See earlier, too, where Françoise realises: 'Les mots ne pouvaient que vous rapprocher du mystère mais sans le rendre moins impénétrable' (I, p. 162); 'Words could only bring you nearer the mystery but without making it any less impenetrable' (SCS, p. 128, ta).

It was like death, a total negation, an eternal absence, and yet through a staggering contradiction, this abyss of nothingness could make itself present to itself and make itself fully exist for itself; the entire universe was engulfed in it, and Françoise, for ever excluded from the world, was herself dissolved in the void, whose infinite contour no word, no image could encompass. (SCS, p. 292, ta)

The threat is like death and not like it, excessive and immeasurable. Language cannot remove the threats to Françoise's existence, 'on ne pouvait pas se défendre avec des mots timides' ('she could not defend herself with timid words') (I, pp. 500-501; SCS, p. 407).

This is an important realisation for Françoise who, before this crisis, had used language to ward off the unthinkable. Language guarantees our existence and identity; we must be able to say 'I am' (I, p. 146). Language confers reality. For Françoise, 'tant qu'elle ne l'avait raconté à Pierre, aucun événement n'était tout à fait vrai: il flottait, immobile, incertain, dans des espèces de limbes' ('nothing that happened was completely real until she had told Pierre about it; it remained poised, motionless and uncertain, in a kind of limbo') (I, p. 30; SCS, p. 17).²⁴ This attitude is discussed by Elizabeth Fallaize in relation to the concept of Françoise and Pierre's indivisibility.²⁵ I should like to modulate slightly her argument that Françoise 'has an unshakable belief in the power of words.' This is true in the sense that Françoise, a writer, never loses her fear of the power of narrative or representation (see below); however, as Françoise's crisis deepens, language lets her down. Her belief that as soon as she had explained things to Pierre, everything would be alright is disappointed (I, p. 195). Likewise, her hope that if she managed to encapsulate her anguish in words, she would be able to escape it; her words did not relieve her (I, p. 369). As language becomes problematical, Françoise comes to see it as part of her predicament rather than as a solution. Language itself is inherently mysterious and ambiguous. Emblematic of this and a Gothic moment in the text is the illegible note, written on a torn piece of paper, that Xavière slipped under Françoise's door ('les dernières phrases étaient tout à fait illisibles') and the illegible notice she pinned to her door ('un gribouillage illisible'): '— C'est illisible, dit Pierre. Il considéra un moment les signes mystérieux' (I, pp. 387-8); 'It's illegible,' said Pierre, as he studied the mysterious marks for a moment' (SCS, p. 313). Françoise loses her trust in words (I, p. 145). She wonders: '[...] Avec Pierre, on se sert tant de mots; mais qu'y a-t-il au juste dessous?' (I, p. 159); '[...] With Pierre, we use so many words, but what exactly lies behind them?' (SCS, p. 126, ta). Language – which amounts to ambiguous symbols (I, p. 160, SCS, p. 177) – is duplicitous. And Françoise is forced into a position where she never knows what anything means: 'Derrière les mots et les gestes, qu'y avait-il?' ('What was there beneath the phrases and the gestures?') (I, p. 166; SCS, p. 131); 'Les phrases de Xavière étaient toujours à double sens' ('Xavière's words

²⁴ Xavière accuses Françoise and Pierre of substituting language for life. 'Vous aviez l'air de vivre les choses pour une fois, et pas seulement de les parler' (I, p. 253).

²⁵ Fallaize, *The Novels*, p. 37.

always held a double meaning') (I, p. 294; SCS, p. 233). She is reduced to guessing (I, p. 314).

Excess that is manifest in Beauvoir's writing is present on a thematic level too. In *L'Invitée*, the confrontation between consciousnesses, signalled in the epigraph, is related in terms of Gothic excess. It is a fight to the death. Literally. This confrontation is overlain by the mortal battle for narrative authority;²⁶ Françoise will kill Xavière, who wishes to 'se saisir de Françoise et la faire entrer de force dans son histoire' ('batten on Françoise and force her to become part of her story') (I, p. 491; SCS, p. 399). Her fear is a Gothic fear of the power of representation.²⁷ Françoise's sense of identity is intimately threatened by Xavière. It is as if she were reduced to a character in Xavière's fiction, as if her identity were nothing more than an effect of Xavière's narrative. She will kill Xavière in order to be able to tell her own story, to impose her version of the truth. Françoise destroys the flesh and blood Xavière so as to destroy Xavière's narrative: 'Jalouse, traîtresse, criminelle. On ne pouvait pas se défendre avec des mots timides et des actes furtifs. Xavière existait, la trahison existait. Elle existe en chair et en os, ma criminelle figure. Elle n'existera plus' (I, pp. 500-501); 'Jealous, traitorous, guilty. She could not defend herself with timid words and furtive deeds. Xavière existed, the betrayal existed. My criminal face exists in the flesh. It will exist no more' (SCS, pp. 406-7, ta). As Elizabeth Fallaize argues, 'she crushes the claim of another to narrate her story.'²⁸

L'Invitée is Gothic in its violence. The novel celebrates Françoise's criminal behaviour. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick tells us that the most characteristic energies of the Gothic novel concern the impossibility of restoring to their original oneness characters divided from themselves.²⁹ A Gothic preoccupation with the dissolution of the self runs through *L'Invitée* as a whole. Françoise's identity progressively disintegrates in her encounter with Xavière; as we read at one of the crisis points in the novel, 'Françoise, à jamais dépossédée du monde, se dissolvait elle-même dans ce vide' ('Françoise, for ever excluded from the world, was herself dissolved in the void') (I, p. 364; SCS, p. 292, ta). She is divided from herself: 'séparée d'elle-même' (I, p. 301) and we read: 'Françoise considéra avec horreur cette femme que contemplaient les yeux fulgurants de Xavière, cette femme qui était elle' (I, p. 499); 'Françoise considered with horror the woman that Xavière looked

²⁶ There is a third struggle taking place, too. This struggle is an allegorical battle: 'A la longue, le caprice, l'intransigeance, l'égoïsme superbe, toutes ces valeurs truquées, avaient dévoilé leur faiblesse et c'était les vieilles vertus dédaignées qui remportaient la victoire. J'ai gagné, pensa Françoise avec triomphe' (I, p. 467); 'In the long run, capriciousness, intransigence, arrogant selfishness, all these artificial values had revealed their weakness, and it was the old disdained virtues which had triumphed' (SCS, pp. 378-9). Françoise's satisfaction is clearly premature. In any case, readers may find it difficult to concur with her, asking themselves exactly which virtues she has in mind. Françoise has made much of jettisoning her 'pure soul,' and this 'victory' seems to reside in deceiving and lying to Xavière. A signal example of *mauvaise foi*?

²⁷ This aspect of Gothic fiction is discussed by Botting. See pp. 14, 157, 171.

²⁸ Fallaize, *The Novels*, p. 36.

²⁹ Sedgwick, pp. 12-13.

at with blazing eyes, the woman that she was' (SCS, p. 405, ta). She can only reintegrate her personality through sacrificial violence. As Xavière is dying, the final words of the text assert: 'C'était sa volonté qui était en train de s'accomplir, plus rien ne la séparait d'elle-même. Elle avait enfin choisi. Elle s'était choisie' (I, p. 503); 'It was her own will which was being accomplished, now nothing at all separated her from herself. She had at last made a choice. She had chosen herself' (SCS, p. 409). On another level Xavière comes between Françoise and Pierre, who assert their unity: 'Toi et moi, on ne fait qu'un; c'est vrai, tu sais, on ne peut pas nous définir l'un sans l'autre' (I, p. 29); 'You and I are simply one. That's the truth, you know. Neither of us can be defined without the other' (SCS, p. 17, ta). When Françoise disagrees with Pierre over Xavière, Françoise 'avait l'impression pénible d'être divisée contre elle-même' ('she had the painful impression of being divided against herself') (I, p. 133; SCS, p. 104). Violence is Françoise's only chance to reintegrate the sundered elements. The text vindicates Françoise, but she is also depicted as a monster.³⁰ *L'Invitée* undermines villain/victim and villain/heroine dichotomies and ultimately subverts the Gothic convention itself; our villain/heroine triumphs, and readers are deprived of the expected Gothic closure advancing moral resolutions.³¹

Xavière, whose very existence is conceived as a threat to Françoise's sense of identity, the embodiment of the threat to Françoise, is constructed by the text as a demoniacal, nonhuman figure. The mystery and threat that Xavière represents are accentuated by the fact that she appears in the text with no introduction. Her relationship with Françoise before the point when they are sitting in the Moorish café together (I, p. 21) is not elucidated. Like other Gothic characters, Xavière, an orphan, appears as it were out of nowhere, with almost no history, like a mysterious foundling. She is the mysterious 'X.' As Beauvoir writes in *La Force de l'âge*, the novel begins when a stranger enters Françoise and Pierre's life (FA, p. 337).

A number of details contribute to the construction of Xavière as a menacing figure. When she burns herself, she is portrayed as crazy and dangerous. Xavière's smile encapsulates her madness: 'Un sourire aigu retroussait ses lèvres; c'était un sourire intime et solitaire comme un sourire de folle, un sourire voluptueux et torturé de femme en proie au plaisir' (I, p. 354); 'A bitter smile [was] curling her lips. It was an intimate, solitary smile, like the smile of a half-wit; the voluptuous, tortured smile of a woman possessed by sexual pleasure' (SCS, p. 284, ta). Xavière's madness is not foregrounded but is all the more 'threatening' in the way it is hinted at. During the Christmas Eve party, Xavière's response to Paule's dance reveals her susceptibility and foreshadows the incidents in the nightclub: 'La bouche entrouverte, les yeux embués, Xavière respirait avec peine; elle ne savait plus où elle était, elle semblait hors d'elle-même; Françoise détournait les yeux avec gêne, l'insistance de Pierre était indiscrete et presque obscène; ce

³⁰ Beauvoir refers to her as such (albeit to regret the aesthetic mistake she made) in FA, p. 387.

³¹ See Botting, pp. 7–8. He points out that some moral endings were, in any case, no more than 'perfunctory tokens.'

visage de possédée n'était pas fait pour être vu' (I, p. 184); 'With lips parted, and lack-lustre eyes, Xavière scarcely breathed; she no longer knew where she was; she seemed out of her body. Françoise looked away, embarrassed: Pierre's insistence was indiscreet and almost obscene, this rapt face was not for public view' (SCS, p. 146). Xavière's reaction to Pierre's telling Françoise that Xavière and he are in love is suggestive of madness: 'Xavière se débattait sans secours parmi ces menaces écrasantes qu'elle apercevait tout autour d'elle, seule comme une hallucinée' (I, p. 255); 'Xavière was struggling all alone with the crushing threats she saw around her, alone like someone suffering from hallucinations.' (SCS, p. 204, ta). Xavière's room is described as the cell of a lunatic ('un cachot d'hallucinée', I, p. 342). Françoise wonders about Xavière's sanity because of her violent reaction to having had sex with Gerbert: 'Et si Xavière était devenue brusquement folle?' (I, p. 387); 'What if Xavière had suddenly become insane?' (SCS, p. 312). There is only one other reference to Xavière's madness: during a quarrel with Pierre, Xavière looks at him 'with the sly and triumphant look of a lunatic' (I, p. 414, SCS, p. 335), and after the quarrel it is as if she were possessed by an enraged demon (I, p. 416, SCS, p. 336).

Repeated references to Xavière's smile, which is not a smile but a maniacal rictus or grin, accumulate in the text and contribute to the creation of a threatening, demoniacal persona.³² For the most part, her smiles are connoted negatively, connected with scorn, malice, and cruelty. Her first smile is 'curious', expressing scorn and even spite, and Xavière's 'jugement malveillant,' her 'malicious reaction,' gives Françoise an unpleasant shock (I, p. 36, SCS, p. 22). The term 'rictus,' commonly used to denote Xavière's smiles, suggests an unnatural, twisted smile, and the image of an animal baring its teeth is often conveyed. Her smiles are frequently secretive and mysterious, expressing connivance with herself. Examples are plentiful. One of the most striking is when Xavière smiles to herself, imagining sadistic sexual pleasure:

Les lèvres de Xavière se retroussèrent sur ses dents blanches.

'Je le ferais souffrir,' dit-elle d'un air voluptueux.

Françoise la regarda avec un peu de malaise [...]. A quelle image d'elle-même cachée aux yeux de tous souriait-elle avec une mystérieuse connivence? [...]

Le rictus s'effaça [...]. (I, pp. 228–9)

Xavière's lip curled back over her white teeth.

'I'd make him suffer,' she said voluptuously.

Françoise looked at her a little uneasily [...]. What picture of herself, concealed from the eyes of the world, was she smiling at with mysterious complicity? [...]

The strange smile left her face [...]. (SCS, p. 183, ta)

At one point, her smile is clearly described in terms of vaginal imagery. It is depicted as dangerous, a wound infected by jealousy: 'Une passion de haine et de souffrance

³² Moi notes how Xavière's mouth is repeatedly emphasised and discusses references to her smile, *Simone de Beauvoir*, p. 116.

gonflait sa face, où la bouche s'entrouvrait dans un rictus semblable à la blessure d'un fruit trop mûr; par cette plaie béante, éclatait au soleil une pulpe secrète et vénéneuse' (I, p. 407); 'A wave of violent hatred and suffering swelled her face where her mouth was partly open in a rictus, like a cut on an over-ripe fruit; and this open wound exposed to the sun a secret, venomous pulp' (SCS, pp. 328–9, ta). This is a vivid, horrific Gothic image.³³ To a great extent it is the accumulation of the motif of the mouth in the text that accounts for its symbolical power.³⁴

Animal imagery associated with Xavière reinforces the impression that she is demoniacal. The bestial within the human is, as already noted, a characteristically Gothic theme. These powerful images can suggest slaughter and cannibalism. The word 'proie' reappears over and over in the text.³⁵ Françoise becomes aware that Xavière is 'charnelle' (animal, sensual) when they are out dancing and when, once again, Xavière's sexual fantasies are under discussion:

Les yeux avides, les mains, les dents aiguës que découvriraient les lèvres entrouvertes cherchaient quelque chose à saisir, quelque chose qui se touche. Xavière ne savait pas encore quoi: les sons, les couleurs, les parfums, les corps, tout lui était une proie. (I, p. 311–12)

Her avid eyes, her hands, her sharp teeth visible between her partly opened lips were in search of something to seize, something tangible. Xavière did not yet know what; sounds, colours, perfumes, bodies, everything was her prey. (SCS, p. 247)

Pierre, who has been surreptitiously watching Xavière, whom he suspects of falling in love with Gerbert, tells Françoise that it is as if Xavière wants to eat up Gerbert. Françoise remembers noticing Xavière's avid look during the Christmas Eve party (I, p. 243, SCS, p. 195). Shortly after the episode in the nightclub, Françoise realises she has been powerless against Xavière's hatred, against her affection, and against her thoughts: Elle les avait laissées mordre sur elle, elle avait fait d'elle-même une proie' (I, p. 364); 'She had let them bite into her; she had turned herself into a prey' (SCS, p. 293). She feels impelled to run away from Xavière and her 'tentacles avides qui voulaient la dévorer toute vive' ('avid tentacles which wanted to eat her alive') (I, p. 367; SCS, p. 295, ta). In her room Xavière is like an animal in her den; the terms 'se terrer' (to go to earth) and 'ruminer' (to ruminate) are used (disturbingly discordant with the term 'cloîtrée' [cloistered] used in the same sentence).³⁶ According to Pierre, Xavière 'se terre dans son coin comme une bête malade' ('buries herself in her lair like a sick animal') (I, p. 163; SCS, p. 129). To Françoise, listening behind Xavière's door, it is as if Xavière's thoughts are alive, as if they are 'animal': 'On aurait cru entendre

³³ The word 'plaie' recalls Xavière's self-inflicted wound, I, p. 354.

³⁴ References to Xavière's smile can be found on I, pp. 68, 72, 75, 124, 190, 253, 308, 366, 395, 416, 495, and twice on p. 498.

³⁵ Examples: I, pp. 312, 354, 364, 365.

³⁶ Conventual imagery is typically Gothic.

palpiter les secrètes pensées que Xavière caressait dans sa solitude' (I, p. 341); 'It was like listening to the heartbeat of the secret thoughts that Xavière caressed when alone' (SCS, p. 274, ta). Xavière's sobbing is described as plaintive animal cries ('plainte animale', I, p. 386), and Françoise imagines her 'huddled wild-eyed in a corner' ('traquée dans un coin') (I, p. 387; SCS, p. 312). The sexual associations of the powerful animal image of Xavière that opens the final episode of *L'Invitée* are unmistakable: 'Une femelle, pensa [Françoise] avec passion. [...] Elle était là, tapie derrière la porte, dans son nid de mensonges [...]' (I, p. 491); "'A bitch,'" she thought, enraged. [...] She was there, crouching behind the door, in her nest of lies [...]' (SCS, p. 399). The animalisation of Xavière combined with the sense of hidden danger make this a supremely Gothic image, full of dread.³⁷

This animal imagery is in sharp contrast to the religious overtones of other images. For example, Françoise hesitates before going into Xavière's room:

C'était vraiment un lieu sacré; il s'y célébrait plus d'un culte, mais la divinité suprême vers qui montaient la fumée des cigarettes blondes et les parfums de thé et de lavande, c'était Xavière elle-même, telle que ses propres yeux la contemplaient. (I, p. 166)

It really was a holy place. Here more than one form of worship was celebrated, but the supreme deity towards whom there rose the smoke of Virginian cigarettes, the scent of tea and of lavender, was Xavière herself, as she imagined herself to be. (SCS, p. 132, ta)

(This is consistent with Xavière's manner when attending to herself; 'there was always something mysterious and ritualistic in her gestures' (I, p. 226; SCS, p. 181).) Xavière is divine then, as well as animal. The resulting discordance adds to readers' uneasiness. However, religion here is distorted; the worship taking place is suggestive of idolatry and narcissism; cigarette smoke and perfume replace incense, and the blood-red light in the room is redolent of sacrifice ('lueur sanglante' I, p. 167). Another memorable religious image occurs in the final lines of Part One of *L'Invitée*; Françoise refers to Xavière as a miracle in her life:

Elle était en train de se dessécher à l'abri des constructions patientes et des lourdes pensées de plomb, lorsque soudain, dans un éclatement de pureté et de liberté, tout ce monde trop humain était tombé en poussière; il avait suffi du regard naïf de Xavière pour détenir cette prison et maintenant, sur cette terre délivrée, mille merveilles allaient naître par la grâce de ce jeune ange exigeant. Un ange sombre avec de douces mains de femme, rouges comme des mains paysannes, avec des lèvres à l'odeur de miel, de tabac blond et de thé vert. (I, pp. 264–5)

She had been slowly withering away under the protection of painstakingly constructed ideas and leaden-heavy thoughts when suddenly, in a burst of purity and freedom, all this too-human world had crumbled away. One open childlike look from Xavière had sufficed to destroy that prison, and now, on this

³⁷ This is not the first mention of a nest in connection with Xavière. See I, p. 152.

delivered earth a thousand marvels would come into being, through the grace of this exacting young angel. A dark angel with gentle feminine hands, as red as those of a peasant woman, with lips perfumed with honey, Virginian tobacco and green tea. (SCS, pp. 211–12, ta)

This dramatic metaphor is Gothic in its emphasis on weight and imprisonment, and it is perfectly integrated in the dense symbolic network of *L'Invitée*. What is of particular interest here is the religious diction employed, 'terre délivrée,' 'grâce,' 'jeune ange,' and the discordances set up; the angel is 'exigeant' and 'sombre.' Paradoxically, it is this dark, destructive angel bringing light into Françoise's life. The sexual overtones of the image are unmistakable. Xavière is surely a fallen angel. According to Xavière herself, her soul is black; it is the bond she claims with Pierre in opposition to Françoise's pure soul. She says to Pierre: 'Vous et moi, nous ne sommes pas des créatures morales [...]. [...] Au fond vous êtes aussi traître que moi et vous avez l'âme aussi noire' (I, p. 443); 'You and I are not moral beings [...]. [...] Deep down you're as treacherous as I am and your soul is just as black' (SCS, p. 359). Xavière's divinity is diabolical. Discordance is set up and resolved. Brought together, the two groups of images, animal and religious, ultimately reinforce each other and the impression of uneasiness conveyed is accentuated.³⁸

The notion that Xavière casts a shadow on Françoise's life is recurrent. In this example Xavière is defined as a mystery beyond language: 'Les mots ne pouvaient que vous rapprocher du mystère mais sans le rendre moins impénétrable: il ne faisait qu'étendre sur le coeur une ombre plus froide' (I, p. 162); 'Words could only bring you nearer the mystery, but without making it any less impenetrable; it only masked the heart in a more chilling shadow' (SCS, p. 128, ta). As the narrative enters its final stages, we read: 'Xavière s'obstinait à demeurer cette étrangère dont la présence refusée étendait sur Françoise une ombre menaçante' (I, p. 420); 'Xavière stubbornly remained a stranger whose rejecting presence cast a threatening shadow over Françoise' (SCS, p. 340, ta). And on the evening before Françoise will kill Xavière, Françoise again refers to Xavière as 'cette présence ennemie qui étendait sur elle, sur le monde entier, une ombre pernicieuse' ('this alien presence which cast a pernicious shadow over her and over the whole world') (I, p. 484; SCS, p. 393).

in Xavière is her smell. References to her malignant aspect. They underline her. It is a motif closely linked to the reminder of Xavière's 'divinity/' tempted by Xavière's 'faint scent' smells associated with Xavière were already quoted: 'la fumée des cigarettes' (p. 166); 'lèvres à l'odeur de miel,

tion with the trio and their relationships. and Pierre (I, p. 227). Françoise reveres the implicit religious image casts Pierre as a and Marie (I, p. 493).

de tabac blond et de thé vert' (I, p. 265). Xavière's smell becomes an obsession for Françoise; as she tries and fails to imagine Pierre and Xavière together in Xavière's room, it is one of the things she focuses on (I, p. 162). When Françoise herself is invited to spend the evening in Xavière's room, she enjoys 'cette lumière funèbre, et cette odeur de fleurs mortes et de chair vivante qui flottait toujours autour de Xavière' ('the funereal light, and the scent of dead flowers and living flesh that always emanated from Xavière') (I, p. 168; SCS, p. 133, ta). Somehow death and living flesh are conflated here; the effect is sinister. The gap between Françoise's pleasure and readers' response produces disquiet.³⁹ When they dance together, Françoise appreciates Xavière's smell: 'avec tendresse, elle respira l'odeur de thé, de miel et de chair qui était l'odeur de Xavière' (I, p. 186); 'with a certain tenderness, she inhaled the odour of tea, honey and flesh – Xavière's odour' (SCS, p. 148). The repetition of 'chair' in particular recalls the menacing associations that have been built up in the text until now, associations that again clash with Françoise's positive experience. Her disquiet is not aroused until she smells a new, mysterious odour: 'mêlée au parfum de tabac blond et de thé qui flottait toujours autour de Xavière, une étrange odeur d'hôpital' (I, pp. 418–19); 'in addition to the usual whiff of Virginia tobacco and tea peculiar to Xavière, a strange new medicinal smell' (SCS, p. 339). Suspense concerning the unusual smell ('l'odeur insolite', I, p. 422) is built up until Françoise realises that Xavière has been smelling ether (I, p. 423). This, too, has Gothic resonances.

Xavière's facial expressions are frequently referred to as a grimace.⁴⁰ Of course, a grimace is a facial expression closely related to a rictus. A grimace is not an attractive look. Paradoxically, Xavière is both ugly and beautiful. Her face is transformed almost miraculously from one to the other. Her physical changeability is highlighted when the two women leave the Moorish café at the beginning of the novel; one moment her face is puffy under the eyes and she looks liverish (I, p. 24); a few moments later her eyes are shining and her skin is pearly again (I, p. 25). Xavière's beauty is diabolical; when Xavière confronts Françoise over her affair with Gerbert, emphasis is placed on fire and burning, motifs that have gathered momentum in the text and are emblematic of hell: 'Elle fixait sur Françoise des yeux brûlants, ses joues étaient en feu, elle était belle' (I, p. 498); 'She was staring at Françoise with burning eyes, her cheeks were on fire, she was beautiful' (SCS, p. 404). Her face exemplifies her duplicity, being at once expressive and indecipherable and full of contradictions, inhuman almost. We read:

Elle avait un séduisant visage, si nuancé, si changeant qu'il ne semblait pas fait de chair; il était fait d'extases, de rancunes, de tristesses, rendues magiquement

³⁹ This disparity pervades the whole episode. Xavière, 'her eyes shining with satisfaction,' appears to take sadistic pleasure in seeing Françoise, who hates tomatoes, swallow a thick tomato purée sandwich. It is impossible to concur with Françoise's indulgent reaction that you would have to have had a heart of stone not to be touched by her joy (I, pp. 168–9, SCS, p. 133).

⁴⁰ See 'grimace' (I, p. 22), 'grimace tragique' (I, p. 41), 'grimace de dégoût' (I, p. 42), 'affreuse grimace' (I, p. 53), 'grimace' (I, p. 120).