

Women's Abandonment in Kali Fajardo-Anstine's Short Stories "Sabrina & Corina" and "Ghost Sickness"

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Abstract

This study investigates the representation of and responses to women's abandonment in Kali Fajardo-Anstine's short stories Sabrina & Corina and Ghost Sickness. Rather than defining abandonment solely as an act of physical separation, this research approaches it from two interconnected perspectives: as a socio-economic condition resulting from the breakdown of family structures and as a form of psychological trauma rooted in early childhood "father hunger." Using a qualitative descriptive method and Simone de Beauvoir's concept of "the Other" as its theoretical framework, the study analyzes how the female protagonists, Sabrina and Ana, negotiate their marginalized identities. The findings demonstrate that abandonment extends beyond the experience of loss, functioning instead as a process of existential erasure in which women are reduced to objectified and subordinate positions within a patriarchal social order.

Keywords: Woman Abandonment, Simone de Beauvoir, The Other, Father Hunger, Ghost Sickness, Kali Fajardo-Anstine

INTRODUCTION

Literature can be a powerful medium for examining the intersection of gender roles, a key social categories that shape individual experiences, identities, and societal structure. Through fictional narratives, authors capture the complexity and nuance of these issues, providing readers with a window into the lives of characters whose experiences reflect broader social realities. Gender roles often determine whether a person will get good or bad treatment from others. Many cases have happened because one gender dominates another, with a different gender, unjustified oppression, defense/double standards for one

gender, exclusion, injustice, and undervaluing of a gender. The relationships among them and the role each element plays in maintaining general stability in society. It postulates that, amidst social disorder, society can be restored to its original state when the elements within it perform their unique roles effectively (DN Ayisi, T Krisztina, 2022). These affect both genders; while men face pressures regarding strength and financial success, women are disproportionately positioned as victims of violence, economic instability, and the trauma of silence (United Nations Development Programme, 2024). Women experience emotional, relational, and physical loss within patriarchal and cultural pressures.

In short, this woman's loss leads to women's abandonment. According to Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1949), the concept of "the Other," which posits that women are defined only in relation to men and thus relegated to a subordinate position, can be used to explain women's abandonment.

In this study, women's abandonment is viewed from two interconnected perspectives: as a socio-economic condition and as a form of psychological trauma. From a socio-economic perspective, abandonment refers to the breakdown of family structures, often resulting from patriarchal failure or substance abuse, which leaves women to bear the responsibilities of the household on their own. Bayati Komitaki et al. (2024) describe this condition as one of "suspension," in which women occupy an uncertain position. They are left without adequate emotional, social, and financial support while remaining tied to the family structure through social and cultural expectations. As a result, they are forced to cope with the lasting consequences of a dysfunctional family without the stability or resources needed to rebuild their lives.

From a psychological perspective, this study conceptualizes abandonment as a persistent form of "father hunger." The absence of a father during early childhood is not merely a temporary life event but a deeply embedded trauma that shapes and disrupts an individual's sense of self (Zengel Mora, 2021). This view is supported by Palkovitz (2002), who argues that a father's active involvement plays a vital role in a child's psychological development; consequently, his absence creates a significant developmental gap. At the broader social level, Freeks (2022) further explains that the prevalence of father absence contributes to both emotional and structural

harm, with its effects extending across generations.

A comparable pattern can be observed in Japan through the phenomenon of *chichioya fuzai*, in which fathers are systematically absent from the household due to entrenched patriarchal norms and contemporary economic demands (Herzog, 2003; Okada, 2020). Similarly, Ashari (2021) argues that growing up without a father in many developing countries can significantly hinder a child's psychological development, suggesting that father absence is not confined to a single cultural context but represents a widespread social issue. As a consequence, individuals often experience what Pauline Boss (1970) describes as "ambiguous grief," a condition in which the absent person remains psychologically present, creating an enduring sense of unresolved loss. According to Zengel Mora (2021), this unresolved grief continues to shape the ways individuals develop emotional attachments and negotiate interpersonal relationships throughout their lives.

Women's abandonment can include women who have been abandoned, dumped, or ignored by their male partners (husbands or boyfriends), the treatment they experienced can be their male partners running away from responsibility in a relationship without a commitment. If pregnancy happened and the male partners did not want it, the male side ("runaway men") often chose to leave. Another form of neglect can be when a wife who has been faithful for decades and has borne him many children is suddenly left by her husband (V. Abraham, 2024). The next is unilateral divorce and polygamy. Men are criticized for their patriarchal culture and chauvinism (considering themselves superior), which leads them to treat women as

objects rather than as equal partners (Mojdeh Shahidi, 2025)

The abandonment of women is not always by men; it can also be by other women, too. From a psychology journal context, Tetiana Liakh (2019) said, "A woman abandoning her newborn" specifically refers to the act of a mother who discards or abandons the baby she has just given birth to. This action is not a random, but rather the result of extreme life stressors. Some of the triggers mentioned include: Lack of support from family or relatives, and mental, emotional, and intellectual unpreparedness for motherhood, particularly in cases of teenage pregnancy or unmarried mothers.

According to Veronese (2023), women's abandonment refers to the neglect, marginalization, and social invisibility experienced by women within correctional institutions. The author argues that female prisoners endure what is described as a "certificate of double abandonment" in comparison with their male counterparts. Even before entering prison, most of these women—who largely come from poor, Black, and socially marginalized communities—had already experienced exclusion and discrimination within a deeply patriarchal and sexist society. In this context, women's abandonment encompasses both institutional and societal neglect. Female prisoners are first marginalized by patriarchal social structures and are subsequently abandoned by a prison system that further deprives them of recognition, care, and fundamental human dignity.

Research on Fajardo-Anstine's works is still relatively limited. Felicia (2022) examines the recurring cycle of abuse and patriarchal dependence in *Sabrina & Corina*, whereas Dur-e-Najaf (2023) focuses on the characters' internal conflicts and the loss of identity

shaped by deeply rooted patriarchal values. Expanding the discussion of patriarchy, Panggabean and Gultom (2024) employ Hannam's feminist perspective to investigate the anthology, highlighting the unequal power relations between men and women while showing how the female characters challenge oppressive social expectations through solidarity. Meanwhile, Miranda (2024) discusses the issues of gentrification and racism presented in the anthology. In contrast, *Ghost Sickness* has not yet been examined as the primary focus of any published study.

To fill the gap in existing abandonment research, this study integrates Mora's (2021) examination of the psychological effects of paternal abandonment with the sociological insights of Bayati Komitaki et al. (2024), whose findings show that abandoned women frequently experience profound emotional suffering and an overwhelming sense of destruction. Furthermore, recent discussions of Beauvoir's work affirm that, because male identities have historically been valued as the "Subject," women's identities are relegated to the "Other," leaving them frequently underestimated and susceptible to abandonment (A Discussion on "Other" Identity in Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, 2024).

Accordingly, this study investigates both the representation of women's abandonment and the female characters' responses to it in *Sabrina & Corina* and *Ghost Sickness*. Through the lens of Simone de Beauvoir's feminist theory, the study explores how patriarchal structures, which construct men as the dominant "Subject" and women as the subordinate "Other," shape the characters' experiences of abandonment. Furthermore, it examines how these women respond to such marginalization, revealing the complex intersections of gender, race, and class. By

doing so, this research contributes to feminist literary criticism by critiquing how literature reflects societal norms and giving voice to the marginalized experiences and resilience of Latina women.

METHODS

This research adopts a qualitative descriptive approach to understanding and interpreting social or textual phenomena through detailed contextual analysis (Creswell, 2018). (Furidha, 2024) adds that this research design allows the researcher to provide a detailed description of phenomena while maintaining the richness of the original context (Furidha, 2024).

The primary data for this study are drawn from textual materials in the short stories "Sabrina and Corina" and "Ghost Sickness". These data include selected quotations, dialogues, character portrayals, and narrative events that illustrate experiences of abandonment and their effects on the female characters. To support the interpretation, the study also relies on secondary sources, including scholarly books and journal articles on Simone de Beauvoir's feminist theory, as well as the socio-cultural background relevant to the stories. This research is based on the premise that abandonment functions as a recurring motif in both short stories and plays, and that it plays a significant role in shaping the female characters' identities and lived experiences.

The main instrument for data collection is the researcher, who serves as the primary analyst. Close reading techniques are employed to identify patterns, themes, and textual evidence. The analytical process involves close annotation of selected passages and dialogues that illustrate the characters' experiences of abandonment. These

annotations are then examined to determine how Corina's and Ana's lived experiences correspond to, or depart from, de Beauvoir's concept of "the Other."

The data analysis is conducted through a descriptive-analytical approach. Rather than merely categorizing data, this study uses theoretical frameworks to interpret the characters' experiences. De Beauvoir's concept of 'the Other' serves as the primary lens to examine how Corina's and Ana's abandonment is not merely a situational event but a reflection of their subordinate position within societal and patriarchal structures. Simultaneously, theories concerning abandonment are utilized to map the psychological and identity-based consequences of being "left behind". By synthesizing these frameworks, the study systematically examines how narrative passages reflect the intersections of gender, culture, and power, enabling the researcher to uncover the characters' underlying existential crises.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Representation of women's abandonment in "Sabrina & Corina" and "Ghost Sickness"

In Sabrina & Corina, women's abandonment is first represented through paternal absence. Rather than portraying abandonment as a single act of leaving, the story presents it as the loss of paternal care and responsibility that continues to affect the women left behind. This is illustrated through Sabrina's experience of growing up without her father. As her grandmother highlighted, her father was a nobody and a "some white guy" (Fajardo-Anstine, 2019, p. 31). Paternal absence is a form of abandonment because it deprives the daughter of emotional security, protection, and parental recognition. His

disappearance leaves a void within the family structure, leaving the women who remain to cope with the emotional and social consequences without paternal support. In this sense, abandonment is represented not simply as physical absence but as the loss of emotional presence. By referring to him only as "some white guy," the narrative minimizes the father's identity while simultaneously exposing the lasting impact of his absence on the women he leaves behind.

Although his role in the family disappears, the consequences of his abandonment continue to shape the lives of those who remain. This contrast demonstrates that abandonment is not defined by the father's disappearance itself, but by the enduring emotional and social void it creates. This unequal condition reflects Beauvoir's concept of "the Other." While the father retains the freedom to withdraw from his familial responsibilities without losing his social position, the women who remain are left to endure the emotional consequences of his absence. Their lives continue to be shaped by a loss they did not choose, reinforcing the patriarchal positioning of women as "the Other" rather than independent subjects.

Paternal absence functions as the earliest representation of women's abandonment in the story, where abandonment is portrayed not merely as physical separation but as the enduring loss of care, protection, and recognition.

Women's abandonment is further represented through objectification, in which a woman's worth is measured by her physical appearance instead of her individuality. This description represents abandonment because Sabrina is acknowledged only for her physical attractiveness, while her emotions, personal struggles, and individuality remain unnoticed. Rather than being valued as a complete

human being, she is appreciated solely for her appearance, reducing her identity to an object of admiration. This is reflected in Sabrina's description as "She was the family beauty, the gorgeous cousin, their lovely doll" (Fajardo-Anstine, 2019, p. 28). This portrayal supports Beauvoir's (1949) argument that women are often defined not by their own individuality but by the significance they hold for the "Subject." In Sabrina's case, those around her, including her family and the wider community, value her primarily as an object of beauty rather than as an independent individual.

The phrase "lovely doll" carries a symbolic meaning. A doll is designed to be admired, displayed, and possessed rather than to express independent thoughts or emotions. By comparing Sabrina to a doll, the narrative strips her of agency and presents her as an aesthetic object whose value depends entirely on how others perceive her. This representation aligns with Beauvoir's (1949) concept of "the Other," which holds that women are defined by their value to the "Subject" rather than by their own subjectivity. Sabrina's identity is therefore constructed through her appearance instead of her autonomy, reinforcing her position as "the Other."

By reducing her to nothing more than a "lovely doll," those surrounding her deny her subjectivity and disregard her emotional needs, valuing only her physical appearance. Because her family, male peers, and the wider community perceive her primarily as an aesthetic object, they overlook her emotional needs and personal struggles. Sabrina is recognized only as a beautiful young woman, not because she is free from suffering, but because her position as "the Other" prevents others from acknowledging the complexity of her inner life.

These recurring patterns of objectification and emotional neglect further reinforce women's abandonment by denying women recognition as autonomous individuals. Through Beauvoir's concept of "the Other," Sabrina's experience demonstrates that abandonment extends beyond physical separation to include the systematic denial of subjectivity and emotional recognition.

In *Ghost Sickness*, women's abandonment is further represented through prolonged uncertainty. Rather than being limited to physical separation, abandonment emerges through the continuous loss of emotional, financial, and relational stability. Unlike the abandonment portrayed in *Sabrina & Corina*, which begins with paternal absence and later develops through objectification, *Ghost Sickness* presents abandonment as an unresolved state created by a partner's repeated disappearances.

Clifton's recurring absences leave women in a constant state of uncertainty, where emotional attachment continues despite the absence of care, commitment, and responsibility. Instead of functioning as a temporary separation, his repeated departures deprive women of emotional security, domestic stability, and the ability to move forward with their lives. This recurring pattern is explicitly reflected in the narration: "Clifton often disappears" (Fajardo-Anstine, 2019, p. 193). The adverb "often" indicates that Clifton's absence is not an isolated incident but a repeated occurrence that gradually becomes normalized within the relationship. Rather than depicting abandonment as a single act of leaving, the story portrays it as a continuous withdrawal of care and responsibility that repeatedly places women in a vulnerable position. This is illustrated when Ana reflects, "that Clifton is gone again.

That this is longer than ever" (Fajardo-Anstine, 2019, p. 198). The phrase "gone again" suggests that the absence is cyclical rather than exceptional, while "longer than ever" underscores the growing uncertainty in the relationship. Instead of offering reassurance and stability, Clifton's repeated disappearances normalize emotional insecurity, leaving women trapped in an indefinite period of waiting, uncertain whether the relationship will ever be restored.

Viewed through Beauvoir's concept of "the Other," this prolonged uncertainty illustrates how a woman's existence becomes organized around someone else's repeated absence. As care, commitment, and emotional presence continue to be withdrawn, abandonment is no longer a single event but an ongoing experience that deprives women of stability, recognition, and an individual sense of self.

Respond to the women's abandonment

In *Sabrina & Corina*, the female character responds to abandonment not through resistance but by accepting the identity imposed upon her as "the Other" rather than asserting herself as an independent subject.

According to Beauvoir (1949/2024), women positioned as "the Other" often internalize the identities assigned to them rather than exercise transcendence to define themselves independently. In contrast to the "Subject," who actively shapes meaning through freedom and action, women confined to immanence tend to accept the roles imposed upon them. When a woman is abandoned, she comes to accept suffering and neglect as an unavoidable part of her existence. This response is evident in Sabrina's interactions with men: "It didn't

matter who it was, so long as they gave her attention back" (Fajardo-Anstine, 2019, p. 35).

Rather than resisting the objectifying treatment directed toward her, Sabrina actively seeks male attention as a source of validation. Her willingness to accept attention from "who it was" suggests that receiving recognition becomes more important than the identity of the man offering it. Instead of developing an independent sense of self, she evaluates her worth based on male approval. This behavior suggests that abandonment does not lead Sabrina to resist the identity imposed upon her. Instead, she responds by reinforcing the very position that confines her as "the Other," continuing to seek recognition through the same social expectations that have denied her subjectivity.

Continuously, women's response to abandonment is continued dependence on destructive relationships rather than the pursuit of an independent existence. Instead of distancing themselves from men who exploit and harm them, women remain trapped in relationships that reinforce their vulnerability. This pattern is represented through Sabrina's experience: "Sabrina continued working in bars and sleeping with men who all looked alike: tall, thick-necked, with green or blue eyes" (Fajardo-Anstine, 2019, p. 34). The repeated similarity of these men suggests that their individual identities are ultimately insignificant; what remains constant is the woman's dependence on male attention despite its harmful consequences. The cycle of abuse becomes even more evident in the narration: "Sabrina would scoop away her hair, and I'd see the bruises, hickeys like rotten goose eggs, down her throat" (Fajardo-Anstine, 2019, p. 34). Despite the visible signs of violence, the relationship continues, illustrating how abandonment may lead women to remain in destructive patterns

rather than break away from them. Viewed through Beauvoir's concept of immanence, this response reflects women's confinement to identities structured around male presence rather than exercising transcendence to define themselves independently. This pattern persists when Sabrina decides to leave with another man: "Sabrina told me that she was moving to California, that she'd met a guy who was opening a bar" (Fajardo-Anstine, 2019, p. 43). Rather than establishing an individual future, the woman continues to organize her life around male figures and to brace her position as "the Other."

The next response to abandonment is women's persistent search for male recognition. Rather than constructing an individual identity, women continue to place themselves in situations where male attention becomes the primary source of validation. This response is represented through Sabrina, as the narrator observes that "a group of men circled around her" (Fajardo-Anstine, 2019, p. 35). The image of men surrounding her suggests that abandonment does not lead women to withdraw from the social expectations imposed upon them. Instead, they continue to seek external recognition through male attention, allowing their sense of worth to be shaped by others' approval. From Beauvoir's perspective, this reflects the internalization of "the Other," whereby women seek recognition within the very system that denies them subjectivity, rather than defining themselves as independent subjects.

Viewed through Beauvoir's concept of "the Other," this response demonstrates how women internalize identities defined through the gaze of others. Rather than establishing themselves as individual subjects, they continue seeking recognition within the very system that objectifies them.

While Sabrina responds to abandonment by seeking validation through external recognition and destructive relationships, *Ghost Sickness* portrays a different response. Rather than directing her suffering outward, the female character gradually internalizes the effects of abandonment, leading to a profound fragmentation of identity.

As a consequence of the abandonment she experiences, Ana undergoes a profound fragmentation of her identity. Rather than asserting herself as a "Subject," she internalizes the role of "the Other," making her sense of self inseparable from Clifton's presence. Consequently, his absence deprives her of autonomy and leaves her engulfed in a profound sense of existential emptiness.

Rather than pursuing independence, women respond to abandonment by developing an unhealthy emotional dependence on men who provide neither stability nor security. This response is embodied by Ana, whose emotional attachment to Clifton becomes absolute despite his repeated absences. As reflected in the narration, "Ana hopes it rains soon, but more than anything, she hopes that her boyfriend, wherever he is, comes home" (Fajardo-Anstine, 2019, pp. 192–193). Instead of rebuilding her life independently, she continues to place her emotional well-being in the hands of someone who repeatedly withdraws from her life.

As the abandonment continues, this emotional dependence slowly develops into psychological fragmentation. Deprived of Clifton's presence, the woman experiences an increasing inability to separate reality from emotional longing, as illustrated in the narration: "She imagines it's Clifton's breath, warm and sticky, in her ear" (Fajardo-Anstine, 2019, p. 194). This hallucination can be

understood as a manifestation of ambiguous grief (Pauline Boss, 1970). In which the absent figure persists as an unresolved psychological presence shaping her inner world. Consequently, the "ghost sickness" she experiences is not merely an isolated tragedy but a manifestation of unresolved intergenerational trauma.

Viewed through Beauvoir's concept of "the Other," this psychological deterioration represents the final response to abandonment. Rather than asserting herself as an independent "Subject," the woman fully internalizes the position of "the Other," thereby making her identity inseparable from the absent male figure. Her "ghostliness" therefore extends beyond a supernatural motif, symbolizing the emotional and psychological consequences of prolonged abandonment. Ultimately, *Ghost Sickness* portrays women's response to abandonment as a gradual loss of identity, in which persistent emotional neglect culminates in profound psychological disintegration.

By doing so, this research contributes to feminist literary criticism by criticizing how literature reflects societal norms and giving voice to the marginalized experiences of Latina women.

The invisible violence of patriarchy: societal norms often define abandonment in a simple way—such as only when someone is physically abandoned—but abandonment can take any form and is far more widespread when analyzed more deeply. In the cases of Sabrina and Ana, the form of abandonment Sabrina experienced was being viewed only as a "pretty doll," while for Ana, abandonment took the form of being required to meet standards whose origins we do not even know. Existential abandonment is a form of abandonment that happens when a person or group fails to acknowledge someone's

existence or views them only as a specific object.

Marginalized women—women from minority or working-class backgrounds (such as the Latina in the story mentioned)—are often blamed for their own downfall—labeled as wayward, crazy, or stubborn. As discussed in Simone de Beauvoir's book *The Second Sex*, "But the types of behaviors denounced are not dictated to women by their hormones or predestined in their brains: they are suggested in negative form by their situation." (de Beauvoir, 1949/1952). Such behavior is a form of self-defense: "Many women are distinguished by the calm tenacity of their passive resistance; they deal with crises, misery, and misfortune more energetically than their husbands" (de Beauvoir, 1949/2010). Self-destructive coping should not be viewed simply as a reflection of personal moral failure; rather, it emerges as a consequence of intergenerational trauma and a patriarchal system that gradually deprives women of their identity.

The illusion of solidarity among women: the story described illustrates how patriarchal structures are not solely perpetuated by men but also by women; patriarchy can easily pit women against one another. Ana's mother and Corina, in fact, become extensions of the oppressive system by judging and normalizing Ana and Sabrina's suffering, rather than serving as a support system that validates them as individuals. Instead of acknowledging that Ana and Sabrina are in distress, Ana's mother and Corina avoid seeing and recognizing their plight.

Mainstream literature often demands that marginalized female characters rise up and fight back. In reality, however, not all women have the chance of fighting back.

Some are broken, give up, and sink into passivity (immanence), like Sabrina and Ana.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that abandonment in Sabrina & Corina and *Ghost Sickness* is portrayed as more than an act of physical separation; it emerges as both a systemic condition and an existential form of loss. Through Simone de Beauvoir's concept of "the Other," the analysis shows that Sabrina and Ana are both subjected to the subtle yet pervasive violence of patriarchal structures. Sabrina is reduced to an object valued primarily for her appearance, while Ana becomes confined by restrictive domestic expectations. Their experiences of abandonment are further intensified by intergenerational trauma resulting from the absence of father figures, as well as by the inability of other women around them to provide meaningful solidarity, ultimately reinforcing the same patriarchal values that contribute to their suffering.

Instead of confronting or resisting the abandonment they endure, both protagonists remain trapped in a state of immanence, accepting the identities imposed upon them by patriarchal society. Sabrina copes with her trauma by objectifying herself and repeatedly becoming involved in destructive relationships, whereas Ana internalizes her emotional suffering until it develops into the psychological deterioration represented by "ghost sickness." These findings indicate that the tragic paths taken by these marginalized Latina women should not be understood as evidence of personal weakness or moral failure. Rather, they reflect the consequences of a patriarchal system that systematically denies women autonomy, agency, and subjectivity. By treating passivity as a

meaningful response to oppression rather than a sign of failure, this study argues that stories of psychological surrender and defeat deserve the same critical attention within feminist literary criticism as narratives that celebrate resistance, empowerment, and liberation.

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