

*The Awakening's* Edna Pontellier, Female Companionship, and the Sea Abstract (2023)

Since the release of Kate Chopin's foundational feminist novel *The Awakening*, scholars have speculated about what the protagonist Edna Pontellier's journey says about 19th-century womanhood. Utilizing a framework established by queer theorists Adrienne Rich and Elizabeth LeBlanc, I argue that Edna represents a "metaphorical lesbian," who rejects her expected social role to live a women-centered life. This identity manifests through her relationships with the feminine "mother-woman" Adèle Ratignolle and the more socially-independent pianist Mademoiselle Reisz. Edna's displeasure with both these contrasting lifestyles contributes to her return to the sea, an unambiguously female figure Edna simultaneously views as a mother and a lover, in hopes of perfectly capturing her desired "lesbian" life. I conclude that the tragedy of *The Awakening* is Edna's inability to make a better life for herself in the present because she desperately wants more freedom than the time will allow.