

In the awakening,  
edna pontellier is  
closely associated  
with two other women  
who ...

[Literature](#)



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

How Madame Ratignolle Serves as a Foil for Edna and how poorly suited Edna's aspirations are in the Awakening In the Awakening, Edna Pontellier who is a in her late twenties awakens to her identity and sexuality. She is a sexually and emotionally repressed outsider and has a little understanding of what is expected of her by the Creole society where she is married. After flirting with Robert Lebrun, she realizes that there are other fulfilling possibilities in life and not just her existence as a mother and wife. She suddenly starts to feel dissatisfied with her husband and the conservative marriage life. Therefore, she transforms from a semi-conscious state of been a devoted mother and wife to been totally aware; hence, acting on her sexual desires, hoping she will be satisfied finally. She becomes an independent woman who follows her passions and urges, leaving behind her family. However, Edna's character isolates her from the society, leading her to leave a life of solitude. Various characters such as Adele Ratignolle and Madam Reisz serve as her foil. Nevertheless, Edna finds that both characters are limited by societal expectations and is disgusted with the life that her friend Ratignolle leads. Although she loves her children, she argues that they cannot "posses her body and soul" (Chopin, "the Norton Anthology" 723). Therefore, this paper gives a limelight to how Madame Ratignolle serves as a foil to Edna and ways in which her aspirations are ill suited. It is evident that Ratignolle is Edna's foil since she is an epitome of the woman's perceived role in Creole society and an example of a woman who is fully devoted to her family unlike Edna.

In Creole society, women are either defined by men or live separately from

<https://assignbuster.com/in-the-awakening-edna-pontellier-is-closely-associated-with-two-other-women-who-represent-opposite-extremes-of-acceptable-behavior-for-women-of-her-social-class-madame-ratignolle-and-mademoiselle-reisz/>

the society. Women are expected to live a pure life and attend to the needs of their husbands and children. They are also supposed to give birth and appreciate womanhood. However, Edna has created a world of her own in which she seeks independence to be free from such expectations. Although she realizes that her children are part of her life, she does not want to be defined as just a mother and a wife but aspires to have more in her life. This makes her life harder since other women around her such as Adele subscribe to a different school of thought and are dedicated to serving their families without having ulterior desires. Her husband, Leonce accuses her often of neglecting her children, asserting, " If it was not a mother's place to look after children, whose on earth was it?" (Chopin, " the Norton Anthology" 837). In that case, Edna is poorly suited to pursue her dreams in a world where people live and think differently from her; hence, becomes despondent and lonely. Although she goes to check on her family, the author affirms that she returns suffering from an unknown oppression. The author describes Adele Ratignolle as " the fair lady of our dreams" who personifies the " lofty chastity" (Chopin 19, 23) of the Creole woman unlike Edna who seeks freedom and goes through self destruction, ultimately committing suicide.

Edna and Ratignolle exhibit some similarities and apparent differences. Just like Edna, Ratignolle is married and has children. She is devoted to her family, serving as a counterpoint to Edna's ambitions and desires. Ratignolle is generous, warm, and fun loving; thus, tries to understand Edna and some of her ideas. She is committed to her family and cannot imagine living in a

<https://assignbuster.com/in-the-awakening-edna-pontellier-is-closely-associated-with-two-other-women-who-represent-opposite-extremes-of-acceptable-behavior-for-women-of-her-social-class-madame-ratignolle-and-mademoiselle-reis/>

world in which she is unable to attend to their wants. Unlike Edna, Ratignolle believes that all women are supposed to behave like her and attend to their families. She refrains from going for parties and is unenthusiastic about visiting her friend's apartment since there were rumors that she was in a relationship with another man. On the other hand, Edna is self-proclaiming and individualistic and would "never sacrifice herself for her children" (Chopin 300). She asserts that, "I would give my money, I would give my life for my children, but I wouldn't give myself" (Chopin 122). It ought to be noted that although she does not hover over her family and is not fully dedicated to them, to some extent she shows them affection and is "fond of her children in uneven, impulsive way" (Chopin, "the Norton Anthology" 647). Her aspirations are to have fun, enjoy the company of other men besides her husband, entertain, and be free from societal constraints. Edna defines herself through immense defiance whereas Ratignolle is defined by obedience. Nevertheless, they both love their children and Edna shows some physical attachment by taking his son "in her arms...calling him all manner of tender names, soothing him to sleep" (Chopin, "the Norton Anthology" 663).

Ratignolle is a close friend and foil to Edna, representing the ideal mother and wife. Edna has no interest in emulating her friend's attributes and she seeks freedom, individual liberties and at the same time tries to care for her family. Ratignolle is happy with her marital life whereas Edna is dissatisfied though is unable to see that she is completely different from her friend (Chopin and Metzger 6). To an extent, she prefers Madame Reisz who

<https://assignbuster.com/in-the-awakening-edna-pontellier-is-closely-associated-with-two-other-women-who-represent-opposite-extremes-of-acceptable-behavior-for-women-of-her-social-class-madame-ratignolle-and-mademoiselle-reisz/>

understands and acknowledges Edna. Reisz tells Edna that, “ the bird that would soar above the level of plain tradition and prejudice must have strong wings” (Chopin, “ the Norton Anthology” 698). This definitely reveals that Edna has chosen a different path that needs strength and perseverance. It is evident in Edna’s world; women were either mothers and wives or exiles. Ratignolle is a mother-woman who does not seek individual happiness but that of her family. She is also a pianist but only creates music as a “ means of brightening the home and making it attractive” (Bloom 70). She is also proud of her pregnancy and motherhood, an act which Edna perceives to be somewhat bizarre. Edna is not satisfied with settling for the mother-woman role and pities Ratignolle since “ it was not a condition of life which fitted her, and she could see in it an appalling and hopeless ennui” (Chopin 145). In conclusion, it is undoubtedly clear that Ratignolle represents various virtues such as purity, domesticity, piety, and submissiveness that lack in Edna. Although both characters are married and have children, Edna fails to emulate her friend and seeks for freedom and individuality. She is not fully proud of just been a mother and finds fulfillment in having extra-marital affairs that alienates her from the society. As a result, she becomes lonely and destroys her life.

#### Works Cited

Bloom, Harold. *The Awakening*. New York, NY: Infobase Publishing, 2009.

Print

Chopin, Kate. *The Awakening*. *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*.

Ed. Nina Baym. New York: Norton & Company, 2003. Print

<https://assignbuster.com/in-the-awakening-edna-pontellier-is-closely-associated-with-two-other-women-who-represent-opposite-extremes-of-acceptable-behavior-for-women-of-her-social-class-madame-ratignolle-and-mademoiselle-reisz/>

---. The Awakening. New York, NY: H. S Stone, 1899. Print

Chopin, Kate and Metzger, Sheri. Cliffs Complete the Awakening. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009. Print

<https://assignbuster.com/in-the-awakening-edna-pontellier-is-closely-associated-with-two-other-women-who-represent-opposite-extremes-of-acceptable-behavior-for-women-of-her-social-class-madame-ratignolle-and-mademoiselle-reis/>