



Challenging Gender Norms: Anne Shirley's Rejection of Femininity in *Anne of Green Gables*

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Article Info	Abstract
<p>Received: 2026-02-13 Revised: 2026 02-19 Accepted: 2026 05-31</p> <p>Keywords: Anne of Green Gables; gender roles; Judith Butler; femininity; gender performativity; literature and society</p> <p>DOI: 10.24256/ideasv14i1.9689</p> <p>Corresponding Author: Amanda Rania Yaasin amandaraniayaasin@gmail.c om English Literature Study Program, Faculty of Languages and Arts, Universitas Negeri Semarang, Indonesia</p>	<p><i>This study examines how a nineteenth-century norm of femininity began to be questioned through the character of Anne Shirley in the novel <i>Anne of Green Gables</i> by L.M. Montgomery. Although this novel has been widely discussed in relation to childhood and moral development, Anne's behavior in this work is particularly noteworthy because it can be interpreted as a performative challenge to limited gender expectations. Using Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, this study applies qualitative textual analysis to several selected scenes, using narrative description and interaction analysis between characters. The results show that Anne's expressiveness, intellectual ambition, and resistance to discipline can be seen as having a performative function that undermines social constructions of femininity. This study also shows that Anne's characterization operates in accordance with literary performances of gender resistance, rather than simply being an unconventional personality. These findings also contribute to the current feminist literary discussion on gender identity in classical texts.</i></p>

1. Introduction

In 19th-century society, feminine traits were generally associated with

obedience, polite behavior, the ability to control emotions, and an orientation toward domestic activities. During this period, literary texts often reinforced this image by portraying girls' childhood as a stage of preparation for marriage and as a means of teaching them how to adapt to existing social norms regarding femininity. This was especially true for children's literature. Children's literature itself served as a cultural tool for conveying the teachings about femininity inherent in the social world while also serving to normalize expectations for children's behavior. Therefore, this study examines how women are portrayed in literary texts that also provide new and unique perspectives on how gender norms are reproduced, negotiated, and sometimes even challenged in specific historical contexts.

From a theoretical perspective, gender itself can be understood as something that is essentially unnatural in nature, but rather something that can change over time alongside social practices. Judith Butler's concept of performative gender also suggests that gender identity is produced through continuous behavior, as well as behavior that has been influenced by all cultural expectations, not just biological factors. This approach makes it possible for characters in literary texts to be read not only from an individual perspective but also as a space where gender norms are practiced, negotiated, or even disrupted. By using the research framework contained in this literary text, the author can see how the narrative shapes femininity as something that can be learned, reinforced, and has a great opportunity to challenge gender norms.

Previous studies discussing the characteristics of Anne have generally only addressed Anne Shirley's thoughts, her moral development, and her strong intellectual ambitions. Some studies also interpret her growth as an example of mental maturity, while others focus only on the storyline of female identity, friendship, and the values found in rural society. There have been readings and analyses of femininity, but in general they only focus on education, rather than analyzing Anne's behavior in defiance of the gender norms established by the culture at that time.

The discussion of gender in literature has been major, especially as scholars reconsider the way the well-known texts reflect or challenge cultural beliefs. Showalter (1999) stated that literature can reveal the way deeply prejudiced and unequal attitudes are rooted in the society, while also presenting the characters who resist or struggle against those conditions. According to Gilbert and Gubar (1984), female characters put into practice rebellion against social expectations can also become symbols of empowerment and revolution. In addition, Butler's (1990) paradigm of gender performativity shows that gender is not biological fact but rather shaped by social expectations. The theory of Butler's proves useful for understanding how Anne "performs" gender at odds with social expectation. Thus, this study not only applies these concepts of patriarchy towards an analysis of Anne of Green Gables, but is also part of a growing body of literature that challenges our

understanding of femininity through literature. Although a number of studies explore Anne's imagination, personal development and relationships, few consider how her behavior subverts the gender norms of her era. The research that did explore Anne's characters through her growth development such as Az-Zahra and Saktiningrum in (2019) saw how Anne finally grow from a lonely child into a confident teenager, however this research did not try to analyse how her character picturing humiliation of femininity. While Hauer (2015) examined Anne against a "stereotypical" Victorian woman, she did not analyze how Anne ruptures feminine ideals. Julianti (2023) discussed themes in the novel around equal rights and education but did not discuss how exactly Anne's character defog irregular femininity. This study undertakes the above-mentioned gap by questioning Anne's behaviour through the angle of Judith Butler's concept of gender performative which results in new findings of undermining manner of behaviours of Anne which goes against the set taboos of his period.

Although these studies have made important contributions, few have been able to clearly interpret the actions of Anne Shirley's character through the lens of gender performativity. Therefore, an analysis that specifically utilizes Judith Butler's framework is still very necessary to clarify how the novel can present gender norms as something that has been socially constructed, not just something fixed or even natural.

This study aims to examine how the novel depicts some expectations for girls in the 19th century, and also how the characterization of Anne Shirley displays a resistance to the norms that have been formed by society and culture. Specifically, this study examines what forms of femininity have been constructed as something that is considered normal and also socially acceptable in the story. In addition, this study also examines how Anne's character behavior has a function as a performative act which also disrupts these expectations. By applying the theoretical framework of Judith Butler in conducting the analysis of literary texts, this study has an attempt to show that Anne's character is done as a form of literary performance of gender resistance, not just a depiction of an unusual personality.

The new work contributes both to the literature and to studies of gender by examining how we might look at gender roles and identity through a new lens, even through a book as classic as *Anne of Green Gables*

2. Method

From a methodological perspective, the author chose qualitative literary criticism to analyze the gender norms that had been established in the culture at that time, and how Anne defied these gender norms in the novel *Anne of Green Gables*. This methodological approach allows the author to interpret the storyline, plot, narrative patterns, characteristics of the characters, behavior of the characters, and also the thematic structure of the story or narrative text. These points are very important to analyze so that researchers can convey social meaning. This approach

is also believed to be the most appropriate approach for analyzing this narrative text. This is because the writing focuses on interpretation rather than numerical measurement.

The main data used in this study are several quotations taken from the novel *Anne of Green Gables* by L.M. Montgomery. This analysis also emphasizes the moments when the character Anne Shirley interacts with her peers and members of the community. Narrative descriptions are also used to more easily reflect social expectations of gender norms for women. The excerpts selected for this analysis are those that clearly illustrate how Anne resists gender expectations.

Several parts of the novel were examined, including Anne's actions, her dialogues, as well as the narrator's descriptions of her. These elements would clarify the way the gender expectations were constructed and the way Anne, as the central character, unsettled them. The analysis underlines the textual features as well that reflected and complicated the established ideas about femininity.

The study also applied the thematic analysis, as we were identifying the recurring ideas such as freedom, resistance, and heteronormative identity. It could be easier to see the way the novel set up a contrast between Anne's character and the rigid gender standard of the nineteenth century. At the same time, the behavior of Anne was interpreted with using Judith Butler's concept of gender as performance.

Additionally, the narrative analysis was also used to consider the role of the narrator in shaping the readers' perceptions of Anne, as well as her social nonconformity. The way the story was told drew an attention to her difference and as a result, it subtly reinforced the novel's broader commentary on gender roles.

Data were collected using a close reading technique for the novel. Researchers also read the text repeatedly to identify scenes that clearly state what girls should behave like, moments when Anne Shirley is reprimanded, criticized, or disciplined, and scenes where Anne reinterprets or rejects these gender expectations. The relevant sections were then highlighted and collected as part of the analysis. This close reading technique enabled researchers to systematically and in-depth identify recurring themes and narrative patterns directly related to the research focus.

Theoretical Framework

This study uses the concept of gender performativity proposed by Judith Butler, who views gender not as a fixed or innate identity, but as a negotiable identity and one that is produced through repeated social action. From this perspective, femininity is not an essential quality, but rather a pattern of behavior that becomes understandable because it has been socially recognized.

This study uses the concept of gender performativity proposed by Judith Butler. Her view of gender is that it is not a fixed or innate identity, but rather an identity that can be negotiated and reproduced through social practices. From this

perspective, it can be seen that femininity is not an essential quality but a pattern of identity that can be understood because it has been socially recognized.

This framework of theoritis is very important in discussing the characters portrayed in literary works. In addition, the theoretical framework used is also useful for analysis because the author can see the behavior of the characters of literary works as one part of the cultural process that can form a gender identity. As we know that literature is not only a work that reflects people's lives and also people's expectations, however, how the reader can participate in romanticizing everything, by showing the struggle between obeying the rules or even rebelling against them. At the time of the 19th century, Anglo-Canadian society had a strong bond of femininity towards women. They form the idea of gender norms towards women in which women are expected to have an obedient, polite attitude, domesticity, and can also exercise good emotional control. It is these gendered expectations that make Anne's characteristics inversely proportional to her great intellectual desire, her strong imagination, and her ability to give frontal utterances. It was these attitudes that allowed the author to interpret the character of Anne Shirley in the Novel L.M. Montgomery, *Anne of Green Gables*.

3. Result

The study discussed how the novel giggles gender expectations in the 19th century, the same way Anne Shirley's behavior defines those norms through tasting resistance in language, imagination, as well as intelligence. The results of this study indicate key patterns: her novels make a strong femininity image, Anne Shirley constantly performs different traits from gender expectations, and finally her story presents her differences as something of social meaning, not just a personal character.

In the 19th century, the girls tended to be guided by strict social rules about to behave, what to think, how to live, and many more There was an expectation of propriety and compliance, and girls were taught to concentrate on developing the skills necessary to run a household, Ambition and individuality were also very often considered incompatible with the idea or understanding of femininity in nineteenth-century cultural discourse. These expectations are reflected in the way character Marilla Cuthbert respond to Anne.

(1) "No. We want a boy to help Matthew on the farm. A girl would be of no use to us." (p. 47)

When Anne Shirley first arrived at Green Gables, Marilla Cuthbert expressed concern that a girl would never be able to fulfill the practical work expected of an adopted orphan. Marilla's reaction when Anne arrives at Green Gables shows that people at the time often thought boys were more helpful or valuable than girls. This belief shows how society thought girls had less to offer unless they fit perfectly into specific roles.

These reactions demonstrate that a woman's usefulness in work and obedience are considered key markers of a good girl. From Judith Butler's theoretical perspective, such hopes and expectations serve as a social script that is continually repeated, and it is through repetition that the concept of femininity is maintained.

On page 57, Marilla also says to Anne "For pity's sake hold your tongue," and "You talk entirely too much for a little girl." because of her lively and talkative nature. This shows the common belief that girls should be quiet and well-behaved. Rachel Lynde also criticizes Anne on page 100, calling her "terrible skinny and homely," There was massive attention given to the way they looked and behaved more than to their abilities or personal aspiration. Both comments reveal and highlight Anne Shirley's personality and appearance, showing that it is considered excessive compared to the limits of behavior expected of girls. These moments show that the novel frames femininity as a performance that is regulated by social norms, rather than as an inherent identity. These moments demonstrate that the novel frames femininity as a performance regulated by social norms, rather than as a naturally inherent identity. Anne, however, does not quietly accept such standards in the area. When she states,

- (2) "You mean, hateful boy!" (p. 166)
- (3) "How dare you!" (p. 166)
- (4) "I shall never forgive Gilbert Blythe," (p. 169)
- (5) "There's a great deal of difference between being called a crow and being called carrots," (p. 169)

Anne's reaction to Gilbert Blythe's teasing has shown that she refuses to tolerate the disrespect. Instead of remaining silent as the women would usually do in that era, she asserts herself and demands recognition.

Her imagination also pushes against the conventional limits. On page 38, she renames Barry's Pond the "Lake of Shining Waters," and it is revealing her tendency to reinterpret ordinary surroundings in creative ways.

Anne of Green Gables Cultural Rules for Girls: The rules that are written for girls in Anne of Green Gables are based on the ideas that are culturally and socially accepted in the society of 19th century. During this time, many believed girls should concern themselves with running a home, looking pretty and following rules. Girls were often told that education and ambitious dreams were not meant for them.

Instead of responding with silence or submission, Anne Shirley openly shows her rejection of the insult. This moment also shows that her rejection has meaning as emotional control, which is usually expected and demanded of a girl. Anne's attitude also illustrates the idea expressed by Judith Butler that gender norms can only survive when they are practiced continuously through actions.

(6) "Oh, what I *know* about myself isn't really worth telling," (p. 64)

(7) "If you'll only let me tell you what I *imagine* about myself, you'll think it ever so much interesting." (p.64)

Anne Shirley's own statement reiterates how self-worth comes from within, rather than being determined solely by social judgment. This shift can also weaken the disciplinary function of gender norms, which depend on external judgment to maintain behavioral conformity. Anne's advice to Diana Barry is an illustration of her belief that true self-worth is independent of the fickle judgments of others and her call to counter the way girlhood is often expressed as concern for the perception of others. This moment allows Diana to believe in her own dreams, even if they differ from society's expectations.

Anne's wild red hair also represents her struggle with society's unrealistic beauty standards. On page 315, Anne says, "In a trice I saw myself with beautiful raven-black hair and the temptation was irresistible" expressing her longing at not being the embodiment of beauty at the time. As a result, by the end of the story, Anne is more concerned with her talent and accomplishments than her looks, thus signalling her dismissal of these shallow standards.

The story's progression from self-doubt to acceptance of who she is demonstrates that femininity doesn't have to be rigid and fixed. In fact, femininity can be shaped through everyday interactions, the way people behave, and Anne Shirley often reflects on her own life. In *The Adventures of Anne Shirley*, her non-conformist attitude continually challenges the outdated values typically placed on women of the time. While most girls in Avonlea were educated to pursue dreams of marriage and domesticity, Anne had even bigger dreams. As she says on page 378, "I'd rather fail the exam than rank high enough on the list," clearly demonstrating her desire to grow as a person and her strong rejection of being merely ordinary beyond what was expected.

In this sense, Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity clarifies Anne's defiance. Butler says gender isn't something you are born with; it's learned behavior that you perform according to societal norms. The repetition of this behavior makes it appear like gender roles are set and unassailable, when they are in fact not. Anne disrupts these closures by performing in ways that contradict the roles assigned to her. Her intellectual enthusiasm is a performative deviation from the expectation that girls should prioritize obedience over knowledge. This also strongly supports Judith Butler's argument that gender norms must be maintained through repeated social practices, not through natural innateness. For example:

(8) "That is one of the advantages of being thirteen. You know so much more than you did when you were only twelve." (p. 303)

Anne is so excited to learn, making her intention to seek knowledge and challenge the notions of the current information era, not just to follow in the footsteps of a marriage and children. Her curiosity and ability to want to learn challenge the notion that girls shouldn't pursue education or their own development.

Anne also an outsider when it comes to traditional notions of beauty. Though the story begins with her self-conscious about her red hair, by the end of the novel, she comes to value her mind and creativity more than her appearance. This adjustment has been signs to signify Anne's her self-assurance and rejection of the era's societal standards for success.

The growing confidence and self-direction from Anne suggest that identity is not entirely fixed by social rules. Her independence, noticeable from her arrival at Green Gables, it has gradually reshaped the way others see her. She does not conform completely, she negotiates her place in her society, she leaves the space for a different understanding of femininity.

The story is told in such a way that readers relate to Anne's struggles and dreams. Because the narrator frequently quotes Anne's thoughts and feelings, readers are able to perceive why Anne adjusts society's boundaries. For instance, on the page 63, Anne says "It's been my experience that you can nearly always enjoy things if you make up your mind firmly that you will." the narrator depicts Anne's desire for acceptance, while still relying on her own inner framework rather than social approval. This moment illustrates how difficult it can be to defy what others expect from you, while remaining confident in your own personhood.

By giving readers access to Anne Shirley's thoughts, the narrator invites them to empathize with behavior that might otherwise be considered inappropriate. This adjustment of perspective also makes readers interpret non-compliance with gender norms as a form of personal uniqueness, rather than as a deviation.

Anne turns traditional notions and guidelines regarding girls upside down in the 19th century through her whimsical nature, dreams, and ambition. Her conduct is consistent with Judith Butler's idea that gender is a "performance" and she is not required to perform the roles somebody else has prescribed for her. Anne's matter of individual, confidence, education, and progressive notions as the best antidote to the most resistant ideas about how girls ought to be is enough to make a reader recognize that Anne of Green Gables is still a primary text in gender and society today.

Overall, the findings that have been analyzed show that the character possessed by Anne Shirley is constructed through several actions that are carried out repeatedly, which reveal femininity as a social performance, not a natural identity.

4. Discussion

This study shows that Anne Shirley's characterization in the novel Anne of

Green Gables consistently disrupts the normative construction of Victorian femininity through her language, imagination, and educational ambitions. Rather than demonstrating a resistance that can be said to be a separate moment, the findings of this study also show a pattern, where Anne's moments of speech, her practice in naming herself, and her strong intellectual curiosity also function as recurring deviations from expected feminine behavior. The pattern shows that Anne's identity is not just an ordinary identity, but structurally, her identity is completely contrary to the dominant gender norms represented in Avonlea society.

In addition to the norms that have been discussed and analyzed by the authors, this study also suggests how L.M. Montgomery produced a denial and also a resistance that was characteristic in Anne Shirley. Anne Shirley's character has a recurring narrative pattern of resistance, such as how the external community reacts to her Resistance, scenes that teach moral advice, and moments where she thinks for herself with her powerful imagination. This continuous narrative pattern shows that gender identity is a pattern that can change over time, rather than being fixed, rigid, or unchanging. However, this failure does not make her detached from society; instead, it shows that gender norms are highly dependent on continuous reinforcement. This interpretation also supports the study of recent feminist theory that shows literary characters often reveal the gender performativity they do because fiction itself provides a space for trying new things or simply imagining alternative identities.

At the same time, this novel also complicates Judith Butler's framework because the character Anne Shirley ultimately remains socially integrated. She continues to seek validation and approval for her attitudes, values relationships with others, and is still learning to gradually control her behavior. This shows that L. M. Montgomery does not portray resistance as something absolute, but as something that can be negotiated within existing social structures. Contemporary literary studies also argue that this form of negotiable resistance is characteristic of late 19th and early 20th century women's fiction, in which female characters challenge norms but do not completely abandon them. Thus, Anne of Green Gables also supports Butler's theory and shows that its limitation lies in the fact that the characters it portrays are consistent with historical literature, whose social continuity remains dependent on a degree of conformity.

The findings of this study also expand previous studies that generally only interpret the characteristics of Anne Shirley's behavior, primarily through the perspective of individual growth or moral development. Studies such as those discussed in Az-Zahra and Saktiningrum's research on Anne's maturation process emphasize psychological transformation rather than gender performance. Conversely, this analysis also shows that what can be seen as "growth" can also be understood as a change in how Anne displays her femininity, namely by moving from open resistance to more strategic negotiation. Recent studies on the characteristics of female characters in gender education novels also show that such

developments often describe and reflect the process of social adaptation, not just simple moral improvement. (Wolfgang, 2017).

Previous research that also discusses the character of Anne Shirley in the novel more often shows the character of Anne who is considered an exception to social norms. In the previous study, it was not shown how fragile these norms are. However, studies examined by Mills (1992) and Kronsell (2015) suggest that Anne's distinction is a performative expression of femininity itself. The more readers who use the view of feminist literary criticism, the more readers who can interpret that the characteristics of this female character is one of the characters that act as a narrative device that expresses gender ideology, not just view it as a deviation.

The Presence Of L.M. Montgomery as a writer of women's literature in the century also significantly influenced how the development of characters in her literary work. In 1908, he lived in an era where changes regarding culture began to develop. Educational opportunities for narrow-minded women began to expand, but the idea of domestic idealism remained strong. As a result, the novels she created are very reflective of the characteristics of female characters that indirectly relate to gender norms that have been created by social. It can also be explained that Anne Shirley strongly opposed the limits of behavior imposed on her with narrative attempts to provide a sense of security or order (Gonick et al., 2009).

The popularity of this novel also shows that readers accepted this balanced form of subversion. Anne Shirley's unconventional personality did not prevent her from becoming one of the most enduring female characters in children's literature. This acceptance also suggests that the text not only rejected Victorian femininity, but also reimagined it in a more flexible form. Instead of presenting rebellion as something threatening, this narrative normalizes difference, as if to show that social norms can still accommodate individuality without completely collapsing (Kerimova, 2025).

Although this novel was published in 1908, Anne of Green Gables remains relevant to current gender debates. The book narratively explains gender identity, self-definition, and social construction of norms, which are highly relevant to current gender issues. Anne Shirley's formation of her identity through imagination, learning, and emotional openness is also in line with contemporary discussions about gender flexibility and the recognition of identities that do not always conform to norms. Literary analysis of classic works is still very important because it shows that the issues of identity negotiation and social pressure are not just modern issues, but part of a long cultural history (Khana Mir & Omar, 2025).

This study still has several limitations. First, this analysis only focuses on one text, namely the novel Anne of Green Gables, so the author's findings cannot be generalized broadly. Second, literary interpretation inherently involves the subjectivity of the researcher, especially when using theoretical frameworks such as Judith Butler's performative concept. This shows that although each reading

technique has accuracy in conducting an analysis, different theoretical views can also produce a different interpretation of the same scene (Chukwumah, 2024).

Further research is expected to be able to expand this analysis through a comparative approach. In addition, it is also expected to discuss further the characteristics of Anne Shirley who had other interactions with female characters such as Jane Eyre or Jo March. With this analysis, the author will more broadly build a literary work with the characteristics of women who have an attitude of resistance. Research conducted for future research can examine sequels, adaptations, and also combine readers' responses with individual analyses to further understand how gender development is represented by historical context. This line of research will help position this novel within a larger literary tradition of exploring identity and social expectations (Lewis, 2018; Stern, 2000).

5. Conclusion

This study will shift our focus to *Anne of Green Gables* and the roles it plays in subverting the aspiring image of what girls in the 19th century were anticipated to act like and how Anne Shirley's character challenged the feminine ideal. The findings indicate that Anne's behavior, ambitions, and personality are inconsistent with the values of her time. Based on Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, this study highlights that Anne vehemently denies the expectations of girls regarding how girls have to act in society. Yet ultimately, she shows that not fitting in and being honest with yourself brings much more opportunity for joy and personal growth.

The character of Anne comes with a strong image of independence as well as imagination. Anne has the commitment to education, and she is able to see the values in her surroundings, thus they are what set her apart from the stereotypical image of girlhood in the late nineteenth century. The novel also presents a shift in the way women's roles might be understood through the story. This implies that the girls at the time were not limited to becoming merely "good" or obedient women. The resistance imposed limits, and she chose her own direction. In this sense, Anne represents the vision of what girls could become, more than society expects them to be.

The technical description of the narrative displayed in this novel also greatly affects the reader how at the time of interpreting it. Stories that are arranged in such a way will affect the emotional readers as well, so that readers participate in the emotions felt by the characteristics of the characters in this novel. This proximity makes the resistance he made against these norms stronger. Even when Anne Shirley's background growing up in an orphanage, which is considered one of her weak points, can not deny that she still has a strong personal in challenging the general idea of gender.

Even so, this study still has a lot of shortcomings in the analysis. The shortcomings contained in this study are the limitations in describing the problems of the novel.

The discussion was dominated by the text. If seen from the background of the author, it will be possible for the author to add additional material to better understand the views of the novel. The researchers also suggest comparing this novel with other literary works of the same era, for how similar themes can be developed. It would also be useful to do an analysis of other female characters such as Marilla or Diana, who had attitudes that were in line with social gender expectations at the time, as well as some who resisted. By analyzing broadly, it will deepen the overall analysis as well.

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