

**Narrative Sovereignty and Feminist Resistance: A Poststructuralist
Reconfiguration of Girlhood in Margaret Peterson Haddix's Just Ella**
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السيادة السردية والمقاومة النسوية: إعادة تشكيل ما بعد بنويّة لرحلة المراهقة في رواية Just Ella

مارغريت بيترسون هادكس

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Abstract

This article advances a feminist poststructuralist interpretation of *Just Ella* (1999) by Margaret Peterson Haddix. It argues that Haddix transforms the cultural grammar of the Cinderella story and moves the feminist attempt of revision away from the realm of the character and centers it on the realm of narrative. Haddix's text is radical because it challenges and, to a great extent, destroys the very scaffolding that underlies the Cinderella story. Haddix's work draws mainly on post-structuralist interpretations of the works of Michel Foucault and Judith Butler, as they are concerned with establishing the discursive (or dominant) truths of narratives (Foucault, 1972, 1977, 1980) and performative contradictions of gender (Butler, 1993, 1997). The article also critiques the heroic structure using Hourihan (1997), as well as McCallum (1999) and dialogic subjectivity in adolescent fiction, Nikolajeva (2010) and Tiffin's (2009) fairy tales. The study advances feminist analysis by emphasizing discourse rather than representation. This analysis recasts distinct areas of fairytale, feminist narratology, and young-adult fiction criticism in their portrayal of girlhood as fluid rather than a static entity needing freedom. This analysis encourages scholars to view girlhood as a palimpsest of narrative ownership and ideological potential. **Keywords:** *feminist narratology; narrative sovereignty; poststructuralism; gender performativity; Margaret Peterson Haddix*

الملخص

تقدّم هذه المقالة قراءة نقدية نسوية ما بعد بنويّة لرواية *Just Ella* (1999) للكاتبة مارغريت بيترسون هادكس، وتذهب إلى أن هادكس تُعيد تشكيل البنية الثقافية لحكاية سندريلا، ناقلةً مسعى المراجعة النسوية من فضاء الشخصية إلى فضاء السرد ذاته. ويستند عمل هادكس في جوهره إلى التأويلات ما بعد البنويّة لأطروحات ميشيل فوكو وجوديث بتلر، بما تُعنى به من كشفٍ للحقائق الخطابية (أو المهيمنة) في السرد (فوكو، 1972، 1977، 1980)، وللتناقضات الأدائية للجندر (بتلر، 1993، 1997). وتُسهم هذه الدراسة في إثراء التحليل النسوي بإبلائها الخطاب الأولوية على حساب التمثيل، وتُعيد عبر هذه القراءة صياغة حقولٍ متمايضة. كدراسات الحكاية الخرافية، والسرديات النسوية، ونقد أدب اليافعين. من حيث تصويرها للأنوثة الفتية بوصفها كياناً سبّالاً، لا كياناً جامداً يستجدي الانعتاق. وتدعو هذه القراءة الباحثين إلى النظر إلى مرحلة الفتاة باعتبارها طرساً (palimpsest) من ملكية السرد والإمكان الأيديولوجي. **كلمات مفتاحية:** السرد النسوي، السيادة السردية، ما بعد البنويّة، مرحلة المراهقة، الادائية الجندرية، مارغريت باترسون هادكس

1. Introduction

The Cinderella tale has proven one of the most effective narratives of the feminine ideal in the Western world. It has been preserved across over seven hundred versions from Chinese Yeh-hsien and the Brothers Grimm, to even the Disney movies. It has traditionally been paired with domestic patience, beauty and suffering, with the story conclusion being marriage to a prince and a happily ever after. (Tatar, 2003; Warner, 1995; Zipes, 2011).

Marina Warner (1995) demonstrated that across time and culture, fairy tales have served the cultural practice of story-telling to women (as a source of both consolation and a warning) concerning the dangers surrounding the marriage, motherhood, and the patriarchal economies of the household (pp. 17–23). The fact that the practice of storytelling had both the ability to reproduce ideology and to conceal criticism meant that from the beginning, the story-telling genre possessed a built-in element of self-subversion. The feminist criticism that burgeoned in the late 1970s, has taken on the task of examining fairy tales, with the varying complexity that characterizes, the place from which the tales have been and continue to be critiqued. Karen Rowe (1979) claimed that fairy tales portrayed ideals glorifying passivity, and self-sacrifice as a female virtue. Other scholars (Cristina Bacchilega (1997), Donald Haase (2004), and Vanessa Joosen (2011),) have illustrated that, in the modern era, stories are being rewritten to expose and criticize the narratives, and in some cases, they have parodied the original tales. This body of criticism is not without contradictions. Bacchilega (1997) points out that many revisionist stories attempt to show their “re-visioning,” but are deeply rooted in the narrative structures that they attempt to replace. The relevant inquiry is not whether the autopoiesis of the new heroine is more autonomous, but whether the narrative/ discursive formations that construct the heroine are disrupted. Empowerment in criticism is not simply represented, but is also in its narrative discourse that is the main focus of this current study. In reinterpreting the Cinderella tale, Margaret Peterson Haddix’s *Just Ella* (1999) has the first-person, retrospective Ella as the protagonist. *Just Ella* opens after Cinderella has gotten married to the handsome prince. Ella now finds herself trapped in the court’s way of life. By the end of the opening headers, Ella is depicted as “cold,” “lonely,” in the gilded court and “engaged to be married in two short months to the most handsome man” in the kingdom (Haddix, 1999, p. 13) (engaged to the in-lined court), and yet is alone. The novel captures Ella’s urge to escape by noticing the court life is a prison and realizing her only option is self-liberation through a self-dug tunnel. This article explicates that *Just Ella* deconstructs the fairy-tale genre within the scope of poststructuralism by transforming the epicenter of feminist challenge from protagonist to paradigm. Centered in Foucault (1972, 1977, 1980) and Butler (1990, 2004) and in conversation with the deviant narratological work of Roof (1996, 1992 on narratology), Lanser (1992), and Warhol (1989), the article elaborates the concept of narrative sovereignty in order to encapsulate the protagonist’s moment of triumph. Narrative sovereignty, as envisioned here, is advocating the self-strengthening rules of self-legitimization in the construction of a self-empowered narrative vis à vis the passive acceptance of narrative authorship and liberal freedom of movement within the parameters of a story. In claiming such sovereignty, Ella is not only the author of a self-empowered narrative within the confines of her fairy tale’s structure of ending, but she is also a co-constructive contributor in demolishing the constraints of the system that sustains, monitors, and legitimates the construction of feminine self as the subject within the fairy-tale’s empire of contradictions. The argument moves in four steps. The second section introduces the relevant literature and identifies the critical horizon of the project as the discursive turn. The third section outlines the scaffolding of the theory and marries a Foucaultian concept of discourse with Butlerian performativity and narratology. The fourth section elaborately develops the close reading, in an articulated fashion. The fifth section builds on implications. The last section is dedicated to concluding thoughts.

2. Literature Review: From Representational Empowerment to Discursive Resistance

The relationship between narrative form and ideological power has been addressed by several theorists, among them Michel Foucault. For Foucault, discourse amounts to “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (Foucault, 1972, p. 49), and therefore, he understands the practice of storytelling as the construction of reality as opposed to its representation. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (1977) identifies the disciplinary mechanisms that stamp themselves on the body through repeated, ritualized acts of training, surveillance, and correction. These acts can also be seen as the courtly pedagogies of the fairy tale. In Foucault’s (1980) *The Power/Knowledge*, Volume 1, Foucault describes how these mechanisms design and impose interpretive frameworks in which some statements are deemed to carry truth and to be pronounced by certain speakers, which he refers to as “regimes of truth” (p. 131). The major contribution of this framework to the present study is that ideological practices are productive and do not simply rearrange or obfuscate some truths that are hiding ‘below the surface.’ Rather, they shape the boundaries of what is thinkable or ‘intelligible.’ Feminist narratology has also offered congruent conceptual ideas in this regard. For instance, Susan Lanser (1992) posits that narrative voice is always gendered as ideologies of power and authority shape to determine who can speak, in what terms, and to what effect”. In the same manner, Robyn Warhol (1989) has shown that practices such as the ‘inviting’ narrator are implicated in the gendered architecture of reading agreement. Focusing on the current argument, Judith Roof (1996) illustrates how conventional Western narrative unequivocally, from a structural point of view, relies on what she identifies as a “heterosexual logic” of pursuit,

obstacle, union, and closure. Because of this logic, marriage, and the narrative closure it encompasses, serves both as the content and the resolution of the narrative. Roof identifies that "narrative form itself is ideologically saturated" as a theory (1996, p. 13), and the framing of this theory, is, of course, of substantial importance for the current claim. It can also be argued that the marriage plot serves as the narrative frame (skeleton) of any fairy tale. Therefore, resisting the narrative closure on the level of character can only be productive to a certain degree unless the narrative is, on some level, frames supplemented (i.e., structural changes).-Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity provides the third component for this study's framework. In line with Butler's (1990) insights in *Gender Trouble*, the author defines gender as the repetition of the body's stylization in the form of acts that, as a result of a sequence of reinforcement of a rigid frame of regulation, materialize to create the facade of a substance of an essence that is natural. Importantly, for Butler, the gaps, the failures, and the parodic iterations of the very fabric of the regulatory regime that structures gender and the subjects that embody gender, are where the potential for resistance is located. Butler (2004) alleged that socially articulated and changeable are the mechanisms by which we are acknowledged as people, to be the terms of Butler's (2004) *Undoing Gender*, extending an account for considering the potential for literary subjects to be agents of the same phenomenon. In fairy-tale studies, three lines of feminist criticism coalesce in this project. First, Karen Rowe, Marcia Lieberman, and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar each investigated the inclusion of specific patriarchal structures in fairy tales, while the second line of feminist criticism, represented by Maria Tatar, Zipes, Bacchilega, and others, investigated postmodern retellings, focusing on the ways in which those tales pare away and later add back the original structures of the stories, as well as the ways in which the tales are potentially reframed and retold within a modern context. Bacchilega argues that postmodern tales double and double-cross the multiple versions of the tale they reference and describes the subversive nature of postmodern tales. The extension of this analysis by Tiffin operates under the principle of marvelous geometry, which provides modern tales, a form of self-awareness, that is, metafiction, in which the narrative is represented as fantastical and properly structured. Tiffin's analysis best describes the modern tales that are the focus of this particular study, as they feature once-untold stories of protagonists that are framed imperfectly, and, as a result, are perceived by the protagonist as fluid and open to revision. The final mode is Joosen's, in which the dialogues of the retellings and feminist criticism either coalesce or merge in ways that ultimately demonstrate that the retellings are, in and of themselves, distinct acts of criticism. Another branch of research on children's and young-adult literature offers relevant theory to help illustration of *Just Ella* and the literary genre in which it belongs. Margery Hourihan (1997) established that the structure of feminist heroic adventure stories is based on the narrative of the Cinderella stories in which the main characters swap the binary hierarchical social and cultural positions where women are defined as marginal or incapable and where the court of the said stories serves as a place for women's ceremonies, flowers and little rewards. Hourihan's support for critical teaching of rewriting the story is evidenced in Haddix's novel. Robyn McCallum's (1999) Bakhtinian interpretation of adolescent literature offers another instance by saying that the formation of subjectivity is dialogical, and that the sense of identity [of the individual] is formed in dialogue with others and with the discourses that exist in his socially and culturally contemporary reality (pp. 3-4). From McCallum's perspective, the primary concern of adolescent literature is not whether the subject exists, but what kind of subject it is and what are the conditions of its coming into being. What is offered by this Bakhtinian perspective, particularly, is the ability to interpret the gradual exit of Ella from courtly discourse, as the active social construction of the self, generation of a subject, through the self-assertion and contestation of the different discursive positions. Lastly, Maria Nikolajeva's (2010) research on power, voice and subjectivity within children's and young adult literature serves as further contextual support. Nikolajeva states that literature aimed at younger audiences is implicitly built on what she calls aetonnormativity, or the adult self-subordinating norm, which marginalizes the child's viewpoint even in child-oriented narratives. Her observations on the narrative voice and how it can challenge or uphold these hierarchies is most interesting for analyzing *Just Ella*, where the retrospective first-person narrative centers on the protagonist and gives her the narrative agency to interpret an adult world that attempts to confine her as an ornamental object. The incorporation of such YA-oriented methodologies combined with the broader poststructuralist frameworks of Foucault, Butler, and feminist narratology is one of the current article's principal contributions. The scholarship on the representation of feminist revisionist fairy-tales is substantial, yet it is still deficient in important aspects. Most of the criticism surrounding revisionist fairy tales, including the limited number of commentaries that employ *Just Ella* (como Bacchilega, 2013; Trites, 2000), remain at the level of representation, examining whether the heroines are strong or active, or independent. But there are still many questions that are still unexamined or remain unanswered. These questions revolve around, or are dependent

upon, the situations of the female subject and how they emerge. This paper will focus on the feminist narratological and Butlerian performative methodology that will focus on several aspects of narratology and the boundaries of feminism, and will introduce and define narrative sovereignty as the agency a heroine embodies when she both discovers her agency and the grammar of ontological reality and the role she is supposed to play.

3. Theoretical Framework

This paper takes a poststructural feminist theory and brings together three interrelated and yet distinct strands of theory. The first is the dis-coanalysis of Foucault (Foucault, 1972, 1977, 1980). This is the theoretical framework I will use to treat the fairy-tale and the ruptures and disruptions in the regulatory order of cultural meanings, as governing regimes that idealize the subjectivities they create. For Foucault (1980), the default view of Cinderella is a regime of truth, and it presents the truth of a self-determined ideal feminine virtue as romantic suffering that facilitates the reward of marriage. Secondly, Butler (1990, 2004) describes the processes by which gender is created and undone through repetition and then offers the words which allow us to make greater sense of the implications of the structures which are created. *Just Ella* focuses on the Courtly Arts and the disciplines of needlepoint, deportment, and proper feminine speech. Stylized repetition is the term Butler (1990) coined to describe the process of gender production. Butler's theory on resistance suggests that, rather than going to a place where one is more true and where the Culture has not persona created, the resistance actually exists in the disruption of the process of reproduction of Culture. Then, with a greater or lesser emphasis on the frameworks of Lanser (1992), Warhol (1989) and Roof (1996), the theories of feminist narratology provide the critical vocabulary which focus on the level of narrative structure (e.g., focalization, voice, plot, and closure). We are able to analyze the formal structure of Ella's discursive resistance through the framework of retrospective first-person narration, free indirect discourse, and explicit metafictional commentary. The synthesis of these three strands produces the article's primary contribution, which is termed narrative sovereignty. It denotes a dual-faceted agency. Internally, it is a protagonist's exercise of precedence over their personal narrative. That is, the protagonist is empowered to make meaning of their lived experiences, and to chart their own teleological direction. Structurally, it is the text's ability to resist, reveal, or revise, the narrative conventions that would position meaning within the text prior to the protagonist's experiences. Narrative sovereignty is therefore neither liberal autonomy, which is the assumption of a sovereign subject prior to narrative, nor the agency that is dominant in feminist discourse, which is often bound to expressive dimensions of action and choice. Rather, it is the discursive accomplishment of a subject, who accounts for themselves in a narrative and as such, is enabled to modify the conditions of their own narrative.

4. Methodology

Utilizing qualitative textual analysis, this study weaves together three complementary methods. First, a close reading from a feminist perspective, analyzes the intimacy of language, tone, and figurative expression. Second, a Foucauldian and Faircloughian reading of speech and silence in the novel looks at speech and silence methods of producing and reaffirming subjectivities from a Brownian perspective. Finally, a deconstructive reading of the text, influenced by Derrida and the feminist actions of Spivak and Cixous, exposes the text's internal contradictions and the structural exclusions that produce a text's disequilibrium. This unified stance, in addition to the narrative form, argues that the text not only contains and configures the potential existing within feminine subjectivity, but that the (feminine subjectivity) potential can be reconfigured subject to (feminine) methods of textual refusal, parody, and reinscription.

5. Analysis.

5.1 The Fairy Tale as Discursive Regime

The first chapters of *Just Ella* describe a moment of discursive disclosure. This occurs when the protagonist begins to understand her life as a fairy tale rather than as a regime that has colonized her life. The inequality fairy tale reality as a regime forms the basis of the irony that justifies the first chapter of the novel's design. Ella has, in almost all the ways that matter, attained and has the right to demand the end of the fairy tale. She is betrothed to a prince, seated in a teacup, and has fairy belongings. However, the narrative voice, to her surprise, again opens the chapter to silence by stating, "I was cold. I was lonely." (p.13) "I was engaged to be married in two short months to the most handsome man I'd ever seen—the prince of the land, the heir to the throne. But I had never felt so alone in all my life, not even shivering in rags in my garret the day they came to say my father was dead. This was happiness?" (Haddix, 1999, p. 4). The palace continued the education of my soul beyond the physical, prison-like walls. This was my new daily, life-curated, purposeful absurdity. I had to waste away my days doing classes about 'royal etiquette,' 'royal genealogy,' and 'royal French' (Haddix, 1999, p. 23) all supplemented by endless, meaningless, and torturous lessons, once again, about needlepoint and propriety, but

this time, of the proper management of proper servants. In the corporeal sense, the combined fabric of the courses I had to study was not because I was polite, but because I had mastered the etiquette and niceties of the royal court that made me a prisoner in my own soul. This was the court-imposed, torture-like, lesson of royal propriety and decency that Madame Bisset had. One day, I had the audacity to light my own fire in the morning to warm my hands and, instead of asking me why I thought I was so above the rules, she exclaimed in pure, performed terror “You must never do that again” (Haddix, 1999, p. 14). My punishment was not of practical because if I was allowed the royal liberty, I would light my fire. My sentence was the royal court of propriety, the decency of it all. In the next lecture, Madame Bisset explains the rationale with frightening precision: servants “exist solely to serve us,” and any disruption to this hierarchy endangers the whole system of intelligibility (Haddix, 1999, p. 16). What this comes down to is not the labor that is performed, but the repetition of the class and the gender demarcations that the fairy tale relies on to maintain its sense. One of the most revealing moments occurs when Madame Bisset, when asked about informing Ella about the condition of a courtier, responds: “I’m sure you’ll be told whatever’s appropriate” (Haddix, 1999, p. 28). The internal narration surprisingly replies, “That word, appropriate, took a minute to sink in. No, I wanted to shout, I want to be told whatever’s true” (Haddix, 1999, p. 28). Free indirect discourse does small analytic work in the passage. “Appropriate” is the term that identifies the discursive limit and “true” names what that limit excludes. The observation made by Foucault (1980), that ‘every society has its own condition of truth’ (p. 131) is most applicable here: the palace in this example is a condition in which truth is exchanged with appropriateness, and the feminine is the sign for the subject not to read the substitution, is the most precise example of Foucault. The most explicit example of metafiction in this example showcases Ella’s response. The soldiers, in a field, are attempting to encourage Ella with her “story” to a peasant audience. Ella answers her own curious, incredulous and analytic curiosity, “Why in the world would I have had mice as friends?” (Haddix, 1999, p. 178). The irrationality of the canon’s variant view from the mind of the fictive heroine confronts the gap of the experience and the representation named by Bacchilega (1997) in the productive site of the postmodern fairy-tale reworking. This disclosure scene provides an ideal example of what Tiffin (2009) has labeled as “metafictional self-awareness” (p.7) in relation to modern fairy tale revision. It occurs when the text begins to reflect upon its own narrative and employ critique of the fairy tale’s broader ideologies. This scene of disclosure is further enhanced when Ella states, “These people had been tricked so badly” (Haddix, 1999, p.107). At this point, Ella begins to identify precisely the deployment of fantasy and the authority ideologies in the tale. It is as if she begins to think like a Foucauldian. In the process of Ella locating the fairy tale, she begins to unfurl Warner’s (1995) historical patrimony that fairy tales (in this case, fantasy) have always acted because of the fact that they were “maps of conduct” (p.22). In the light of the political “inflection” (p.22) that occurred, Ella’s faint, liberating drafts of a map which she drew herself illuminate her own life escape. Significantly, drawing a map is an expression of unfurling a sense of domination. What is uniquely apparent to *Just Ella* over the previous feminist retellings is that the heroine, in the case of Ella, ascends over the fairy story. As Linda further clarifies that what she feels is that the mind of the author is what makes the construct / what makes the tale. Ella’s final reflection in the fields is a clarion declaration in the fantasy and undermines the ideologies as she declares, “Would I ever find where I belonged?” (Haddix, 1999, p.104). The interrogative mood marks formal resistance in discourse, exemplified in *Just Ella*, where instead of a closure in declaration where the canonical story ends, it begins with prolonged inquiries.

5.2 Disrupting the Marriage Plot as Discursive Resistance

Ella’s ultimate rejection of marriage demonstrates that her decision was not founded on personal inclination, but rather a strategic argument against the small-scale logic of the fairy tale’s governing structure. According to Roof (1996), coherent narrative seeks closure through production of a heterosexual union. Roof’s argument demonstrates that within a Western narrative, the marriage plot serves a grander purpose than being simply a thematic element. To decline from marriage within that context is to decline from the union as well as the narrative’s logic. Ella’s narrative attempts precisely such a declaration. Disrupting the logic of a marriage plot like Ella is accomplished through critiquing the value of marriage and romance as a sign of love. Ella’s response to Prince Charming’s affection was critical. His attempts proved not to be about his genuine interest, but the outcome of what was to be a forced situation. The conversations were “awkward” and rehearsed. The presence of a chaperone was there to carry out the expression of courtly desire (Haddix, 1999, p. 59). Ella assessed her feelings and discovered—for once—the truth of the situation. She summoned an image of his “perfect” everything, and felt an “affective void”—a complete absence of the required precedent of courtly desire: Surely it was worth it, for the sake of loving the prince. I waited to be swept up in my usual rosy glow of love for

Charm. I waited for my heart to speed up, the way it always did at the thought of him. I waited for the flush to creep up my face, the delicious shiver to crawl up my back.

Nothing happened.

I tested myself again.

Charm? Prince Charming? I conjured up the image of his perfect face, his perfect hair, his perfect body. I pictured him kissing me, touching me, holding me.

I felt nothing. Except—bored. (Haddix, 1999, p.65).

In Butlerian terms, the iterative chain of the performance has misfired, and the effect has been lost.

This affective failure leads to the novel's longest scene of discursive insurgency, the breaking of the engagement. Ella's decision comes in the absence of fairy-tale fantasy. "I want to call off the wedding. I can't marry you. I, well, I'm very sorry, but I just don't love you. I thought I did, but it was just infatuation, I guess, I honestly don't even know you—" (Haddix, 1999, p. 72). Infatuation, a discovered genre demand, is more easily named than love, which is thinner and more difficult, and a refusal of love is even more daunting. The prince's reaction affords the same insight. Left by Ella's refusal of his discursive position, he first attempts to achieve a the paradox of discourse by literally silencing (Haddix, 1999, p.72) and then discursively resorting to a declaration of authority by disposing (Haddix, 1999, p. 73). Ella's succinct, yet in a discursive sense, maximal, response comes in the most succinct, declarative discourse of the cumulative argument of the novel: "No, I said, I will not" (Haddix, 1999, p. 73). The prince's escalation—including shaking and shouting, in addition to his self-defending statement, "I'm the prince. My family makes the rules. We don't have to follow them if we don't want to" (Haddix, 1999, p. 73)—exposes what is usually hidden in the genre: the marriage plot is not created by all-consuming mutual desire, but by structural coercion that is legitimized and reinforced by repetition. Foucault's (1977) claim that "discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, 'docile' bodies" (p. 138) is literally illustrated here. When Ella negatively responds to the portrayal of the "docile" character, the prince is then left with no option but to respond with obvious aggression. Disciplinary power strives to be the absence of force, but the prince is left with no other option but to literally force Ella this scene performs a Foucauldian unmasking. Hourihan's (1997) analysis of the heroic narrative is particularly insightfully here. She argues that traditional adventure and romance plots structurally position female characters as "prize, helper, or obstacle" to a male protagonist whose subjectivity is the only one the narrative recognizes. *Just Ella* inverts this configuration with unexpected sophistication. The prince, thinking he is the one heroic subject, is unexpectedly tackled

5.3 Refusing Femininity: Performativity and Its Breakdown

If the marriage plot exemplifies the macro structure of the fairy tale's discursive regime, the micro-disciplines of feminine comportment represent its capillary operations. *Just Ella* captures these capillary operations with documentary precision. The novel's compendium of courtly disciplines almost reads as a Butlerian primer: royal genealogy lessons, needlepoint, proper ladylike behavior, the meticulous control of dining, the prohibition of lighting your own fire, summoning servants by bell instead of by request, the catechism of "twenty beliefs" that would make Ella "a fit wife for the prince and a fit mother for a future king" (Haddix, 1999, p. 31). In Butler's (1990) view, these are the "stylized repetition of acts" (p. 191) via which the gendered subject is produced. What *Just Ella* accomplishes, with increasing intensity, is the unravelling of these iterations. The heating incident is paradigmatic. Faced with the prohibition of lighting the fire, Ella challenges this with the question: "Why?" (Haddix, 1999, p. 14). In light of Butler's theorizations, a single question is theoretically laden with meaning. Butler argues that gender norms operate seamlessly when they are neither challenged nor questioned, and remain as Butler explained: constitutive outside of the human. In light of this, Ella's "Why?" pierces the fabric of the prohibition, and in light of this, demands just justification, therefore the prohibition is revealed to be a social construct rather than a self-evident truth. Madame Bisset explains that servants "exist solely to serve us" and "cannot respect a member of the nobility who lowers herself to their level" (Haddix, 1999, p. 12) demonstrates the labor of normalization, but the effort required for this explanation of the world order to be seamless indicates the presence of the order itself. Ella's longest performative breakdown happens when she meets her training to be passive. She notices that the cumulative effect of the courtly relations is a profound state of inertia, both physical and intellectual. In a brave act of defiance, she breaks the regime of stillness and proclaims, "I want to do something. Jump. Dance. Run. Live" (Haddix, 1999, p. 64). In this particular instance, the rigorous rules of feminine behavior and expression contract and expand. She also breaks the constraints on expression during a moment of escape. She reflects on the tools that just freed her and again

re-articulates the goal and function of her breaching feminine behavior: "I wanted my hands to be more useful than that. I wanted my life to be more useful than that" (Haddix, 1999, p. 97). The parallel is evident: the disciplines that have defined her body have also defined the life that her body is supposed to lead. The most interesting example of Ella's self-construction through performative femininity occurs when Ella's examination of love begins. Ella's self-examination of love in Haddix's work is a perfect example of the 'rhetoric of love' in Judith Butler's theory. The citation mechanism of love is a self-restraining discipline. Ella's love of 'Prince Charming' provides a perfect example of this. Ella tells herself, "I am engaged. Prince Charming is supposed to be your passion. No, he is your passion. You love him" (Haddix, 1999, p.36). We see in Ella's grammatical self-instruction the internal conflict of the self within a particular socially situated identity in a writing and a love act. She pedagogically instructs herself to reason in plural. 'He is supposed to be your passion' allows for Ella to consider. 'He is your passion' helps Ella to adopt conclusively. And 'You love him' brings Ella to perform passionately. This self-instruction ideological conflict of Ella's love conveys the structure of citational. Love is a self-restraining discipline and Ella's declaration 'Somehow though, it seemed like I needed more' (Haddix, 1999, p. 36). The norm has been recited, love was the object, but for the system of education Ella was the subject, it was not fulfilled and was self-restricting. To some extent, Ella's refusal of competing standards of femininity in the court women's homosocial rivalries among court women style in the Canonical Cinderella is made explicit in *Just Ella* when she refuses acts of rivalries in Canonical Cinderella's. The way she interacts with the maidservant Mary, along with her disdain for the "moronic Simprianna" and "the breathtakingly beautiful but addled Cyronna" (Haddix, 1999, p. 65), and eventually her horizontal solidarity with female refugees in Jed's camp, all demonstrate what Bacchilega (1997) refers to as the "double-crossing" of the postmodern tale's structural homosociality (p. 27). Characteristically of the fairy tale form's patriarchy, Ella's denial of the prince is, in Bakhtinian terms, a denial of the prince's competing economy. Interestingly, Ella's various acts postulate that her resistance is of a more macroscopic nature in as much as she is able to frustrate the self-renewing nature of the fairy-tale femininity chain. The closing remark of the novel that Ella's refugee work would have excited the great disgust of the women at the castle, who would have "turned back to their fancy silks and satins, their perfect little needlepoint designs" (Haddix, 1999, p. 123), integrates both the iterational and the broken orders in the economy of performativity. More importantly, the negation/broken iteration is not a return to a feminine essence. Rather, it results in a redefinition of the original terms of a feminine essence, in the protagonist's self-defined new (feminine) domain. It is this that the following section will attempt to theorize as narrative sovereignty.

5.4 Narrative Sovereignty and the Reconfiguration of Girlhood

As detailed by the author, the idea of 'narrative sovereignty' denotes a character's right to dictate the terms of her own representation. This is more complicated than the ability to make choices within a narrative. It is also the ability to question and reshape the language that describes the stories that exist about you. In her analysis, Warner (1995) explores the little-known legacy of "runaway girls" in fairy tales such as *Donkeyskin*, *Cap o' Rushes*, and the unnamed daughters of D'Aulnoy and L'Héritier, all of whom escape from patriarchy, not to remarry, but to engage in 'self'-creative work (pp. 318–335). Warner's work has unearthed the resources for alternative plot lines, particularly for *Just Ella*'s escape. For Ella to dig a tunnel, and then assume a role of responsibility for directing a refugee camp, is to recover a feature of the fantasy genre Warner's work has sought to diminish. In *Just Ella*, the author has put in a clear formulation of this idea in, two passages that contain the same idea but of two different forms. The first instance is attributed to Jed's general observation that the monarch prefers the fairy-tale fabrication of Ella's story, as opposed to the reality, and that, 'those tales can't be stopped'. "People would rather believe in fairy godmothers and... well, divine intervention, if you will – than to think that you took charge of your own destiny." (Haddix, 1999, p. 58). Jed precisely differentiates between the two regimes the novel has also been posing. It is a regime where feminine fortune is attributed to supernatural intervention, and a regime where it is the accomplishment of a free, sovereign agent. The preference indicated as to where the populace is the former signifies the ideological labor the genre produces. As part of the fairy tale, it, in a way, exists to make rather unthinkable the very potential of self-authorship the fairy tale produces in a disguised way. In this culture, to be self-directed, to be in charge of your destiny is to be paradoxical. Paradoxical is also what the genre remains to mystify as magic. The second is embedded in the novel's closing thoughts. This is where Ella rewrites the prophecy of a village woman, who, the moment the prince's carriage was dispatched to fetch her would, as the case may be, cackle, "Now, there's one who will live happily ever after." (Haddix, 1999, p. 123). Ella's nine-month reflection over that prediction will be a memorable feat of a hermeneutical operation. And suddenly I understood the old woman's prediction in a new light. Happiness was

like beauty—in the eye of the beholder. Maybe the old woman could be right in a way she'd never intended. I did know this: I liked my life the way I was living it. (Haddix, 1999, p. 123) This passage purposefully reworks the conventions used at the close of genre texts. Rather than simply representing a mystical endpoint, "happily ever after" becomes a subjective perspective, a viewpoint of this particular moment. Rather than canceling, the prophecy is redefined. The old woman's utterance, originally structured in the deterministic clauses of the fairy tale, is now shifted to a viewpoint in which the meaning of the formula is dependent on the subject. This is the most accurate depiction of narrative sovereignty: the closure of the genre is not simply challenged by the protagonist; it is reclaimed, renewed, and resettled on her terms. This sovereignty, throughout the entire text, is sustained both at the voice level and at the structure level. At the voice level, the entire text is framed by first-person retrospective narration, wherein Ella is the protagonist as well as the narrator. Ella is the one who tells the story and, by extension, the one who dictates the interpretation of the story. Ella's first, and therefore most primitive, act of narrative sovereignty is described in the first line of the text: "The fire had gone out, and I didn't know what to do" (Haddix, 1999, p. 1). The closure to the following fairy tale is in Ella's hands, as the fire of the original fairy tale (fairy tale closure) has been extinguished as a result of the structure of the tale. The character of Ella is, therefore, is forced to create closure from her own resources. At the structure level, the abandonment of the closure formula registers on the overall framework of the narrative sovereignty in the novel. *Just Ella* concludes not with a wedding, but with Ella starting her competent labor at the refugee camp, with a romantic possibility which she has explicitly refused to foreclose. Instead of a wedding, the book concludes with her negotiating a romantic possibility with the open-ended temporal setting of the future. When she was asked to marry, for example, she replied, "the answer is, I don't know" (Haddix, 1999, p. 115). She also asked, "can't you give me six months and ask again" (Haddix, 1999, p. 116)? The deferral here was the most significant structure shift in the story, (Haddix, 1999). Just Ella replaces the traditional fairy tale closure with a substitute for an answer, "not yet." This is most certainly not a policy outlining a withholding of love, but a restructuring for the order of the timeline in which love can be described. From the account of Ella, marriage was, and mostly likely still is, for her a move, "toward" her beloved. Ella outlines low and high boundaries on the romantic closure. Ella most likely would not move, if you were to marry, from one romantic dedication "toward" closure, to "from" another romantic dedication "toward" closure. The final boundaries on romantic closure from the account of Ella are again most likely (low boundaries) subservient. Ella ends her final thoughts most likely in the most politicized but self-fulfilling format. Haddix also uses temporality and the choosing subject to justify and enforce Ella moving inward and then also to sidestep another closure policy to the fairy tale, which she maintains Ella is most self-fulfilling for. Sovereignty is defined in the positive: it is the control over the magnitude and the tenor of one's relationships. Kind of like the way Ella view her relationship with Mary (the one with the shovel), and her relationship with Jed (the 'boss' of the camp), and with Jed's Refugee Women (whose welfare she manage). This re-conceptualization of 'girlhood' in *Just Ella* is that it is not the waiting time in patriarchal narrative before the arrival of the 'story' (the end). It is the discursive time in the making. A time in which the girl decides on the genre of her narrative and of the prospective futures the patriarchal society has to offer. Ella's self-reflection in the final pages clarifies the political stakes of this sovereignty. Acknowledging that her freedom has not been solitary—"even the most independent people sometimes needed help." (Haddix, 1999, p. 123)—she displaces the liberal autonomous subject in favor of a more relational conception of agency. Sovereignty here is not the absence of dependence but the capacity to choose the terms of one's relations: with Mary, who brought the shovel; with Jed, whose camp she now runs; with the refugee women whose welfare she organizes. Girlhood, in *Just Ella*'s reconfiguration, is no longer the period of waiting before patriarchal narrative arrival; it is the period of active discursive construction in which a young woman determines the genre of her own future.

6. Discussion: Toward a Discursive Model of Feminist Empowerment

The above reading suggests a new direction for feminist literary criticism concerning 'empowerment' in reworking fairy tales. In the relevant criticism, the reading suggests moving away from the established binary of 'strong' versus 'independent' heroine, and instead exploring whether or not and also how the discursive regime in the construction of the heroine has been disrupted. According to this reading, *Just Ella* exemplifies a thorough disruption by intervening at the level of plot grammar by refusing marriage, at the level of performative iteration by breaking the feminine chain, at the level of focalization by substituting Ella for the fairy-tale omniscient narrator, and at the level of generic intertext by critiquing the classical fairy tale through Ella's encounter with incredulity at its peasant representation. Three additional comments can be made. First, the reading indicates that the most important feminist reworking of the fairy-tale narrative is not redefining and

repositioning a heroine vis à vis a patriarchal paradigm but a repositioning of the very patriarchal paradigm in a new structure. This constructs a new theory within literature, partially correcting and extending previous literature that seldom awarded revisionist heroines any structural agency. Bacchilega's (1997) finding that, still, postmodern reworkings of fairy tales remain bound to the narrative grammars they try to subvert is rare in *Just Ella*, for a structural enactment disruption of the emancipation paradigm.

Secondly, narrative sovereignty is a bedrock concept.

Agency is thought of as the ability to act within a certain set of rules, whereas narrative sovereignty is the ability to question and change those rules. The two notions are not mutually exclusive. In fact, narrative sovereignty is the discursive condition that makes comprehensive feminist agency possible. Narrative sovereignty allows the actor to change the script, whereas agency allows the actor to act within the script. Trites's (2000) important theory that "the institutional construction of the self" (p. 7) is the differential trait of young adult novels as compared to earlier children's literature deepens in this context as *Just Ella* is part of a collection of young adult novels which recognizes the self as a product of the social structures and depicts the protagonist as a self-author in relation to the structures. Further depth is added to this topic thanks to the McCallum's (1999) Bakhtinian theory. McCallum argues that adolescent subjectivity is created through social and cultural discourses of the society in which the protagonist is situated, and thus narrative sovereignty can be defined as the ability to take on the social and cultural discursive roles of a co-author. Ella takes the social and cultural discourses and engages her own critical and subversive discourses with them. The structure of the novel, which features a first-person retrospective narrative woven with metafiction and a subversive discourse, embodies this dialogue. This analysis is relevant to feminist narratology, young-adult literary criticism, and poststructuralist literary criticism beyond fairy-tale studies. Nikolajeva's (2010) account of "aetonormativity" in children's literature considers the structural privileging of adult perspective and authority, and brings to light another aspect of *Just Ella*'s intervention. The novel does not merely challenge patriarchy. In an empirical sense, the novel intervenes through the lens of an adolescent female character, and therefore, Ella's interpretive authority is an important and rare literary contribution. Ella, a 15-year-old girl, is the defender of the prophecy of the village crone, who implements pedagogical spellbinding, and who creatively surpasses the prince and stepmother. In Nikolajeva's words, Ella is a self-claiming voice, resisting the double subordination of gender in this case, and age. If, as Roof (1996) argues, narrative in and of itself, evidences a definition-bound ideology residing in closure, it is therefore relevant and politically charged to ask who possesses, in the context of the present article, narrative sovereignty, and as a result, who, therefore, controls the form. The girl-narrator, who re-defines the genre of her own life, is a model for contemplating the possibilities of carving interventions at a higher order of form, as opposed to interventions at an order of content. In that respect, *Just Ella* is the most important of all Just addresses because it stands, temporally, in the form of a model for a set of productive interventions, as it analyzes the discursive, designable, labor through which, in the most holistic sense, the Just adjunct. Ella is the most important of all Just addresses because it stands, in the form of a most productive set of interventions, a model.

7. Conclusion

This article has argued that *Just Ella* reconfigures the fairy-tale genre by relocating the locus of feminist resistance from the level of character to the level of discourse. Through close reading informed by Foucauldian discourse analysis, Butlerian performativity, and feminist narratology, the article has shown that Ella's refusals—of the prince, of courtly comportment, of generic closure—constitute not merely characterological assertions of independence but a sustained discursive intervention into the regime of truth that organizes the Cinderella tale. The concept of narrative sovereignty has been proposed as the appropriate name for this intervention: the capacity, exercised simultaneously at the levels of voice, focalization, plot, and generic intertext, to claim authorial jurisdiction over the conditions of one's own legibility. This argument has significance beyond the local case of a single young-adult novel. It suggests that feminist literary criticism may benefit from a sustained attention to the discursive scaffolding of genre, and not merely to the actions of characters within particular narratives. It indicates, further, that the most radical form of feminist textual intervention may be one that disturbs the very grammar by which feminine subjectivity is rendered narratable. Future research might productively extend this framework to other revisionist fairy tales—Donoghue's *Kissing the Witch*, Maguire's *Confessions of an Ugly Stepsister*, Block's *The Rose and the Beast*, among others—or to neighboring genres in which questions of narrative authority and gendered subjectivity converge. It might also engage more deeply with the specifically young-adult dimensions of the text, exploring how the figure of the adolescent girl, situated at the threshold between scripted childhood and contested adulthood, becomes a privileged site for staging the discursive labor of narrative sovereignty. What *Just Ella* ultimately demonstrates

is that the most profound form of empowerment may not be the freedom to choose within an existing story but the freedom to reauthorize the story itself. In a cultural moment in which the fairy tale continues to circulate as one of the most powerful and globally distributed templates for gendered subjectivity, this is no small achievement. Ella's closing affirmation—"I liked my life the way I was living it" (Haddix, 1999, p. 123)—is, in this light, neither modest nor private. It is the declarative formula of a subject who has claimed, against the genre that produced her, the sovereign right to determine what "happily ever after" shall mean.

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