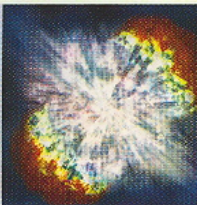


# Inside the U.S. Attorney Scandal

How politics drove decisions at the Justice Department



## A Really Big Bang! Meet the Supernova

# The Shrek Effect

Why fairy tales have changed forever and ever



# TIME

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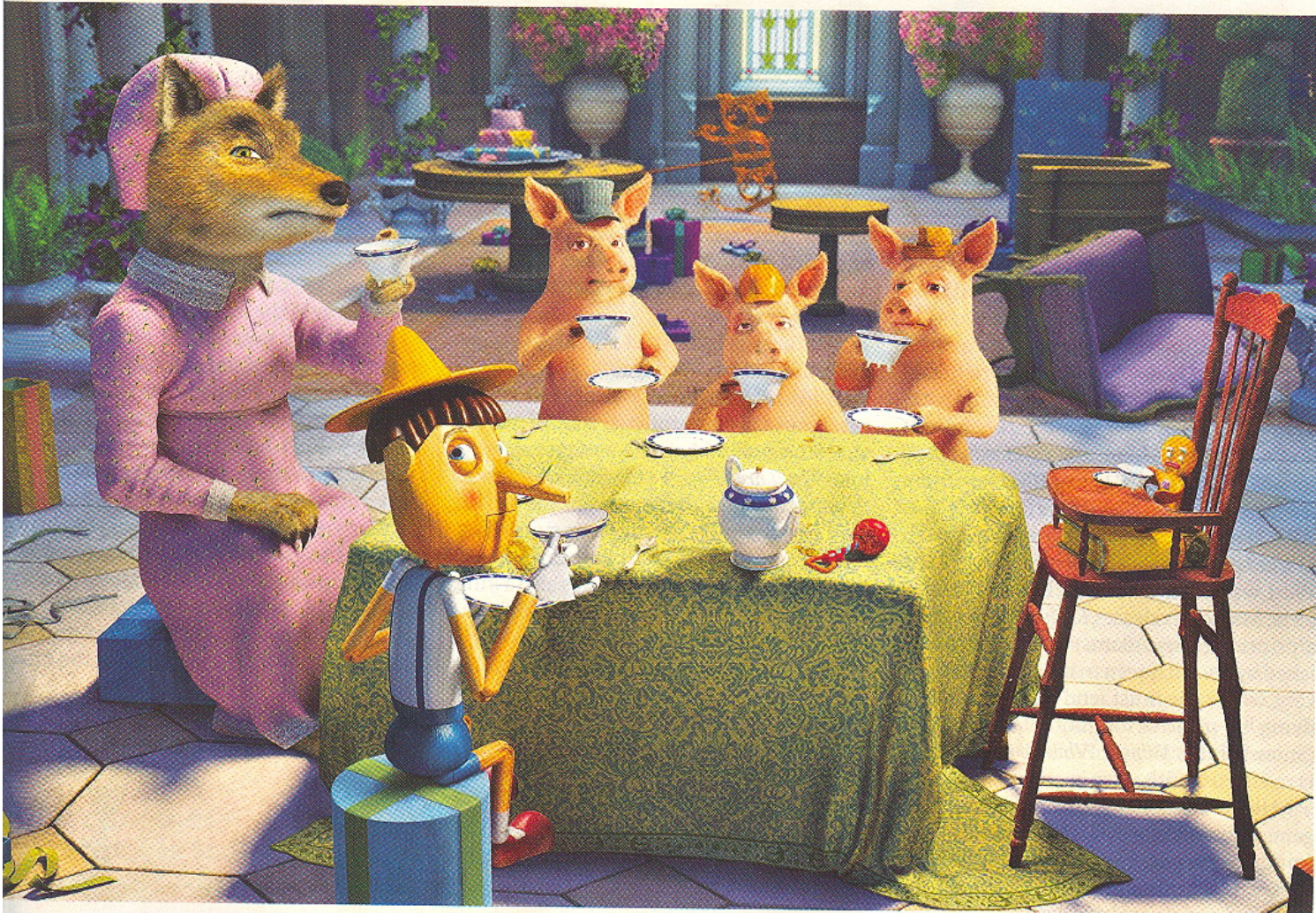


# Arts



Self-Portrait: Edward Hopper (1925-30) Exhibitions, page 86

MOVIES EXHIBITIONS DOWNTIME



**Easy being green** *The star ogre has made parodies of classics bigger than the originals*



## MOVIES

### The End of Fairy Tales? How Shrek and friends have changed children's stories

BY JAMES PONIEWOZIK

ONCE UPON A TIME, IN A LAND NEAR NEAR BY, there were fairy tales. Brave princes slew dragons and saved fair damsels. Princesses and scullery maids waited for brave knights and true love. The good were pretty, the evil ugly, the morals absolute. And lo, it was good. If you liked that sort of thing.

Then a hideous green monster appeared and threw the realm into chaos. Handsome princes were mocked, damsels saved themselves, and ogres and dragons were shown to be decent folks once you got to know them.

And lo, it was even better—particularly for the movie industry. The first two *Shrek* movies, which upended every fairy-tale cliché they could get their meaty chartreuse



## Wand Ambition. Some of the ways pop culture has tweaked, poked and made over fairy tales



### MOVIES

#### STARDUST

August 2007

Starring **Charlie Cox, Claire Danes, Michelle Pfeiffer**

A country boy (Cox) journeys to a magic kingdom to retrieve a fallen star (in the person of Danes)—who is also targeted by a witch (Pfeiffer) and some not-so-charming princes.

#### ENCHANTED

November 2007

Starring **Amy Adams, Patrick Dempsey, Susan Sarandon**

A princess (Adams, left) is banished from her magic kingdom by a queen (Sarandon) and lands in Manhattan, where she finds the usual rules of happily-ever-after do not apply.

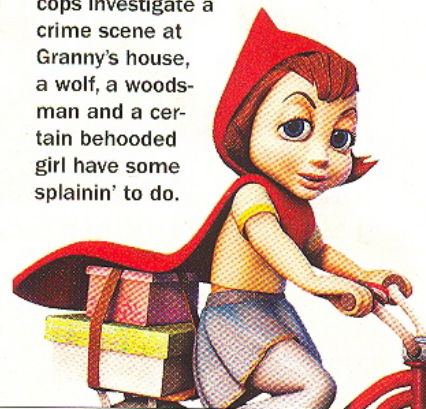
### DVDS

#### HOODWINKED!

2006

Starring **Anne Hathaway, Glenn Close, Patrick Warburton**

Think of it as *Law & Order: Fairyland*. When the cops investigate a crime scene at Granny's house, a wolf, a woodsman and a certain behooded girl have some splainin' to do.



paws on, grossed more than \$700 million in the U.S. alone; there's little reason to believe that *Shrek the Third* won't fill its hungry Scottish maw with hundreds of millions more after it is released May 18.

*Shrek* consciously rebelled against the sentimental Disney hegemony of fairy-tale movies. But today the outlaw is king: parodying fairy tales has become the default mode of telling them. 2005's *Hoodwinked!* reimagined *Little Red Riding Hood* as a crime *Rashomon*, while this year's *Happily N'Ever After* sent up *Cinderella*. Broadway smash *Wicked* posits that the Wicked Witch of the West was misunderstood. This fall Disney (et tu, Mickey?) releases *Enchanted*, in which a princess (Amy Adams) is magically banished by an evil queen to modern New York City, where she must fend for herself, parodying her princess foremothers as she goes. (Snow White's *Whistle While You Work* scene is re-enacted with vermin and roaches.)

All this has been a welcome change from generations of hokey fairy tales with stultifying lessons: Be nice and wait for your prince; be obedient and don't stray off the path; bad people are just plain evil and ugly and deserve no mercy. But palace revolutions can have their own excesses. Are the rules of fairy-tale snark becoming as rigid as the ones they overthrew? Are we losing a sense of wonder along with all the illusions?

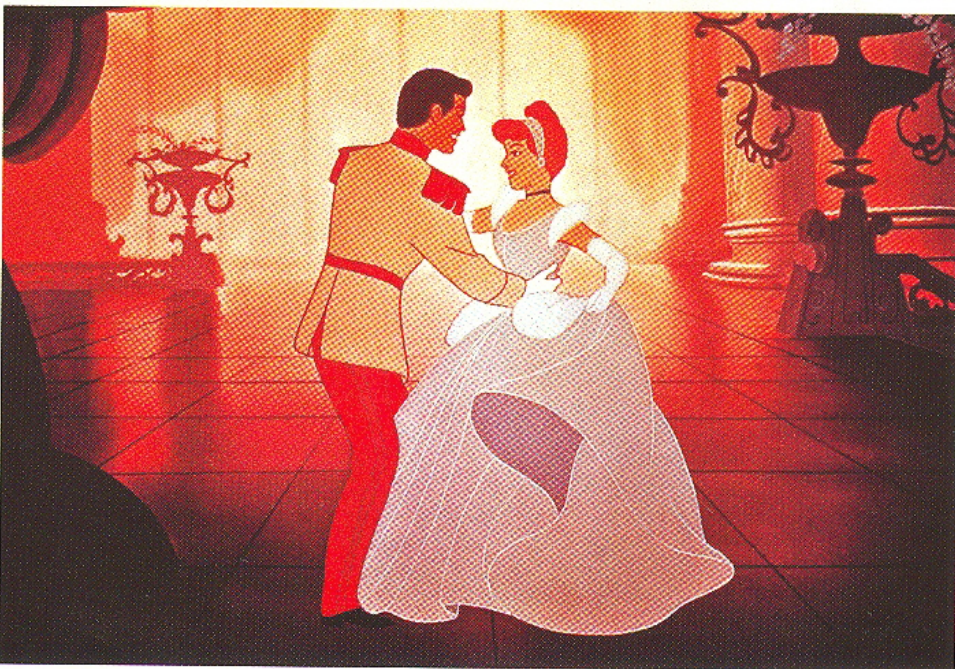
*Shrek* didn't remake fairy tales single-handed; it captured, and monetized, a long-simmering cultural trend. TV's *Fractured Fairy Tales* parodied Grimm classics, as have movies like *The Princess Bride* and *Ever After* and the books on which *Shrek* and *Wicked* were based. And highbrow postmodern and feminist writers, such as Donald Barthelme and Angela Carter, Robert Coover and Margaret Atwood, used the raw material of

fairy stories to subvert traditions of storytelling that were as ingrained in us as breathing or to critique social messages that their readers had been fed along with their strained peas.

But those parodies had a dominant fairy-tale tradition to rebel against. The strange side effect of today's meta-stories is that kids get exposed to the parodies before, or instead of, the originals. My two sons (ages 2 and 5) love *The Three Pigs*, a storybook by David Wiesner in which the pigs escape the big bad wolf by physically fleeing their story (they fold a page into a paper airplane to fly off in). It's a gorgeous, fanciful book. It's also a kind of recursive meta-fiction that I didn't encounter before reading John Barth in college. Someday the kids will read the original tale

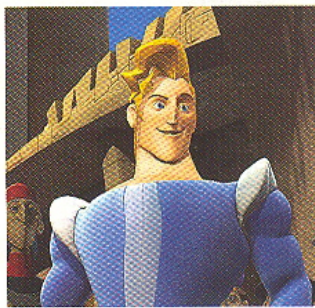
and wonder why the stupid straw-house pig doesn't just hop onto the next bookshelf. Likewise, *Shrek* reimagines Puss in Boots as a Latin tomcat—but what kid today even reads *Puss in Boots* in the original?

This is the new world of fairy tales: parodied, ironized, meta-fictionalized, politically adjusted and pop-culture saturated. (Yes, the original stories are still out there, but they don't have the same marketing force behind them: the Happy Meals, action figures, books, games and other ancillary-revenue projects.) All of which appeals to the grownups who chaperone the movie trips and endure the repeated DVD viewings. Old-school fairy tales, after all, are boring to us, not the kids. The *Shrek* movies have a high-scientific formula for the ratio



Once upon a time Beautiful girls like Cinderella had little to do except wait to be rescued





**HAPPILY N'EVER AFTER**  
May 2007

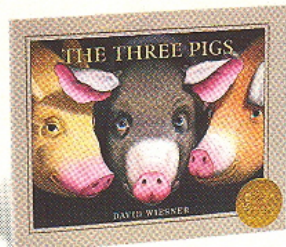
Starring Sarah Michelle Gellar, Freddie Prinze Jr. In a *Cinderella* meta-tale, the evil stepmom gains control of her story and several others by swiping a wizard's powers, letting the bad guys rule.

**BOOKS**

**THE THREE PIGS**

By David Wiesner  
2001

Postmodernism for preschoolers! The oinkers of the classic tale escape the wolf into the margins of their book and have an intertextual adventure, befriending the Cat and the Fiddle and saving a dragon.



**TELEVISION**

**THE FAIRLY ODDPARENTS**  
Nickelodeon, debuted 2001

One of Nick's most successful animated shows introduces only child Timmy Turner to Cosmo and Wanda, a pair of magical guardians who generally end up creating as many problems as they solve.

**THEATER**

**WICKED**

Opened in 2003, starring Idina Menzel, Kristin Chenoweth This Broadway musical, adapted from a 1995 Gregory Maguire novel, rehabilitates the reputation of the Wicked Witch of the West (Menzel, below left)—who, we learn, was actually a rebel against the corrupt Wizard of Oz.



of fart jokes to ask-your-mother jokes; *Shrek the Third* includes a visit to a fairy-tale high school where there's a Just Say Nay rally and a stoner-sounding kid stumbles out of a coach trailed by a cloud of "frankincense and myrrh" smoke. More broadly, each movie gives Shrek and Fiona an adult challenge: in the first, to find love and see beyond appearances; in *Shrek 2*, to meet the in-laws; in *Shrek the Third*, to take on adult responsibility and parenthood (Shrek has to find a new heir to the throne of Far Far Away, or he will have to succeed the king).

Then there are the messages aimed at kids. What parent today wants to raise an entitled prince or a helpless damsel? Seeing Snow White turn from cream puff into kick-ass fury in *Shrek the Third*—launching an

types—fairyland Adam Brodys. "Charming" is redefined rather than repealed—Justin Timberlake voices *Third's* cute-boy hero Arthur—but at least that's some progress.

Tweaking fairy tales also allows movie-makers to tell stories about themselves without boring us. The *Shrek* movies are full of inside jokes (the kingdom of Far Far Away is essentially Beverly Hills; the first villain was widely seen as a stand-in for then Disney chief Michael Eisner). Fairy-tale parodies are safe rebellions, spoofing formulas and feel-good endings while still providing the ride into the sunset that pays the bills. In *Happily N'Ever After*, a wizard runs a "Department of Fairy-tale-land Security," seeing to it that each story—*Rapunzel*, *Rumpelstiltskin*, etc.—hews to the book. His bored apprentice Mambo articulates the strategy of his movie and its peers: "I just wish we could mix it up a little. Make it a little edgier! Then let 'em have their happy ending."

Sound like a formula to you? What these stories are reacting against is not so much fairy tales in general as the specific, saccharine Disney kind, which sanitized the far-darker originals. (As did *Shrek*, by the way. In the William Steig book, the ogre is way more brutal, scary and ... ogreish.) But the puncturing of the Disney style is in danger of becoming a cliché itself. The pattern—set up, then puncture, set up, then puncture—is so relentless that it inoculates the audience against being spellbound, training them to wait for the other shoe to drop whenever they see a moment of sentiment or magic. Every detail argues against seeing fairyland as something special, like the constant disposable-culture gags in *Shrek*, in which characters shop in chain stores like Versarchery and Ye Olde Foot Locker.

I feel like a traitor to my fellow parents for

even saying this. These movies are made in part for me: a socially progressive, irony-friendly Gen Xer with rug rats. I thought *Hoodwinked!* and most of the *Shrek* series were hilarious, and God knows I don't want to go back to the days of suffering with my kids through a long, slow pour of Uncle Walt's wholesome syrup. But even if you ultimately reject their messages, old-school fairy tales are part of our cultural vocabulary. There's something a little sad about kids growing up in a culture where their fairy tales come pre-satirized, the skepticism, critique and revision having been done for them by the mama birds of Hollywood. Isn't irony supposed to derive from having something to rebel against? Isn't there a value in learning, for yourself, that life doesn't play out as simply as it does in fairy tales? Is there room for an original, nonparodic fairy story that's earnest without being cloying, that's enlightened without saying wonder is for suckers?

In fact, the strongest moments in *Shrek the Third* come when it steps back from the frantic pop-culture name dropping of *Shrek 2* and you realize that its Grimm parodies have become fleshed-out characters in their own right. In August, Paramount releases *Stardust*, an adaptation of a Neil Gaiman novel about a nerdy 19th century lad who ventures from England to a magical land to retrieve a fallen star. The live-action movie covers many of the same themes as the ubiquitous cartoon parodies—be yourself, don't trust appearances, women can be heroic too. But it creates its own fantastic settings (a seedy witches' bazaar, a sky pirate's dirigible ship). There's a kind of surprise and unembarrassed majesty that come from minting original characters and imagery rather than simply riffing on our cartoon patrimony. In the end, that's how you make magic.

**Shrek reimagines Puss in Boots as a Latin tomcat—but what kid today even reads Puss in Boots in the original?**

army of bluebirds and bunnies at the bad guys to the tune of Led Zeppelin's *Immigrant Song*—is more than a brilliant sight gag. It's a relief to parents of girls, with Disney's princess legacy in their rearview mirrors and Bratz dolls and Britney up ahead. It goes hand in hand with a vast genre of empowered-princess books (*Princess Smartypants*, *The Princess Knight*) for parents who'd rather their daughters dream of soccer balls than royal balls. As for the boys? Jocks have a rough time of it (a handsome prince is the villain of *Shrek the Third* and the buffoon in *N'Ever After*), supplanted by gangly emo