

Is That Satire or Are You Just Happy to See Me? by D.V. Berkom (*originally written for Indies Unlimited*)

"I didn't attend the funeral, but I sent a nice letter saying I approved of it." – Mark Twain.

Satire *n.* (*from the Free Dictionary*)

1.
 - a. A literary work in which human vice or folly is attacked through irony, derision, or wit.
 - b. The branch of literature constituting such works.
2. Irony, sarcasm, or caustic wit used to attack or expose folly, vice, or stupidity.

Even if you didn't know the definition of satire before you read the above paragraph, you've more than likely read it or watched it on television. *South Park*, *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* are examples of modern satire. Mark Twain was considered a brilliant satirist. Jonathan Swift, of *Gulliver's Travels* fame, was a gifted satirist. Dorothy Parker is a personal favorite. *The Onion* is a news satire organization that has been around since 1988.

It's everywhere.

Poking fun at society's idiosyncrasies is an age-old vehicle to reveal humanity's foibles and is an entertaining outlet for writers and other artists in a *free* society. And, it's a heck of a lot of fun to write. I've used satire to poke fun at politicians, serial killers, reality shows and the like. It's all in good fun and readers get a glimpse of my (twisted) view of the world. That's one of the things I love about satire: reading it is a sure-fire way to view the world through another's eyes. It makes life more fun and I remember not to take myself or my own views quite so seriously.

Which takes us to:

Parody *n.* (*from the Free Dictionary*)

1. A literary or artistic work that imitates the characteristic style of an author or a work for comic effect

Parody is a subset of satire. *Fifty Shades of Earl Grey* is a parody of the mega-bestseller, *Fifty Shades of Grey*. I just ran across a cookbook called *Fifty Shades of Chicken* by F.L. Fowler (hilarious, btw). *Vampires Suck* is a parody of the Twilight movies. Do a search of the word parody—you'll find several contemporary examples. Mel Brooks, Monty Python and the *Scary Movie* franchise, and older movies like *Airplane! Hotshots!* and *Naked Gun* are well-known examples.

But what about copyright infringement? Why is it okay for people to steal an idea and make fun of it, and nobody goes to jail or pays a fine? Parody and satire are generally allowed under the *fair use doctrine*, although the judgments are determined on a case-by-case basis and allowance is not guaranteed. Copyright is a matter of law and protects exact expression, not an idea, which means lifting a paragraph from a copyrighted work can get you in big trouble, but staging a play or writing a book poking fun at the same piece won't. If it was, then the above-mentioned television shows and movies would be in a heap of trouble.

Without satire, the world would be a much duller place. If we can't laugh at each other, then we'll have to laugh at ourselves, and some of us just aren't that funny.