Satire, irony, humor
Satire, irony, humor

1. Satire

Two ideas of satire come from Roman culture:

- the former expresses a basic instinct for comedy through **mockery of human beings**;
- the latter implies the desire of the satirist to instruct his readers by **setting moral standards to reform social conduct**, or **denouncing everything** in human nature that he finds **distasteful**.

No sharp distinction can be made between these two kinds of satire since **the tone of the satirist’s attack** can range from **light humour to biting sarcasm** according to the degree of indignation.
Satire has been used since the beginnings of English literature. For example **Chaucer satirised the corruption of the Church** in his *The Canterbury Tales*.

The 18th century was the golden age of satire:
- **Addison and Steele** satirised the customs of the age in prose.
- **Swift** is regarded as the greatest ironist in the English language.
2. Irony

IRONY

is not a direct, open attack

The ironist

• surprises the reader;
• does not want to change or reform, but simply to create awareness in the reader.
2. Irony

There are three kinds of irony:

1. **verbal irony** in which the writer says one thing and means something completely different.

An example of verbal irony can be found in ‘The Wife of Bath’ from *The Canterbury Tales* by Chaucer (→ 2.9):

*In all the parish not a dame dared stir  
Towards the altar steps in front of her,  
And if indeed they did, so wrath was she  
As to be quite put out of charity.*
2. Irony

There are three kinds of irony:

2. **dramatic irony** in which the reader (or the audience) perceives something which a character does not know.

An example of dramatic irony can be found in *Macbeth*, Act 1, Scene 6, in which Duncan visits Macbeth’s castle where later he will be murdered:

*DUNCAN* This castle hath a pleasant seat; the air
Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself
Unto our gentle senses.
There are three kinds of irony:

3. situational irony in which a discrepancy between the expected results of a situation and its actual results is shown.

An example of situational irony can be found in the text *Gulliver and the Lilliputians* (➔ 6.10) from *Gulliver’s Travels* by Swift ➔ there is a discrepancy between the Lilliputians’ description of the objects they find on Gulliver’s body and what they actually find.
Humour differs both from satire and from irony.

- It does not deride or hint at;
- It simply evokes laughter as an end in itself.

The humorist sees the faults of his subject but accepts them and laughs at them.