



Literary Terms  
for  
*The Importance of  
Being Earnest*  
by Oscar Wilde

# Epigram

- a short statement with a witty turn of thought or a wittily condensed expression

Example: I can resist anything but temptation.

# Pun

- an expression that achieves emphasis or humor by utilizing...
    1. two distinct meanings for the same word -  
play (fun)/play (on stage)
- OR
2. two similar sounding words - close/clothes

# Irony

- A subtle, sometimes humorous perception of inconsistency in which the significance of a statement is changed by its content (the firehouse burned down)

Dramatic Irony: Audience knows more about the character's situation than the character does, foreseeing an outcome contrary from the character's expectations

Structural Irony: A naïve hero whose world view differs from the author's and reader's; flatters reader's intelligence at expense of hero.

Verbal Irony: a discrepancy between what is said and what is really meant; sarcasm (calling a stupid man smart)

# Farce

- An exaggerated type of comedy full of ludicrous incidents and expressions.
- Primary intention to make people laugh
- Burlesque in nature, which requires physical action and buffoonery



Lucille Ball from *I Love Lucy*

# Satire

- Using humor to ridicule

Example: Jonathan Swift's "A Modest Proposal"

Satirical Comedy: a plot intended primarily to ridicule foibles (shortcomings) and vices (what people like/love) of society

Comedy of Manners: Satirical drama with witty dialogue dealing with illicit lovers and mistaken identity

# Other Comedy Types

Tragicomedy: main plot is serious and might lead to a catastrophe but ends happily for the protagonist

Sentimental Comedy: plot in which the protagonist, no matter how dissolute (bad), reforms (changes) at the end

Comedy of Humors: a play in which an excess of one of the humors (blood, sadness, etc.) controls the protagonist (rather a caricature is developed) (Think Adam Sandler's character in *The Wedding Singer*)

# Art for Art's Sake

- Doctrine that does back to Edgar Allan Poe: “the poem is written solely for the poem’s sake”
- Aim is for the creation and perfection of expression of the text, NOT to produce some moral, political or social good.
- Wilde supported this view

Looking at this photo of the Earth, what would the interpretation be according to this term?

