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?