

### ***The Importance of Being Earnest Key Terms:***

1. **Comedy of manners (GENRE):** witty, cerebral form of dramatic comedy that depicts and often satirizes the manners and affectations of a contemporary society. A comedy of manners is concerned with social usage and the question of whether or not characters meet certain social standards. Often the governing social standard is morally trivial but demanding. The plot of such a comedy, usually concerned with an illicit love affair or similarly scandalous matter, is subordinate to the play's witty dialogue.
2. **Satire (GENRE)** exposes and criticizes foolishness and corruption of an individual or a society, by using humor, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule. It intends to improve humanity by criticizing its follies and foibles. A writer in a satire uses fictional characters, which stand for real people, to expose and condemn their corruption. In addition, he hopes that those he criticizes will improve their characters by overcoming their weaknesses.
3. **Aphorism (literary device):** a statement of truth or opinion expressed in a concise and witty manner. The term is often applied to philosophical, moral, and literary principles. To qualify as an aphorism, it is necessary for a statement to contain a truth revealed in a terse manner. Aphoristic statements are quoted in writings, as well as in our daily speech. The fact that they contain a truth gives them a universal acceptance and makes them stand on their own.
4. **Epigram (literary device):** a pithy saying, remark, or poem expressing an idea in a clever and amusing way. An aphorism can serve as an epigram if it is brief.
5. **Paradox (literary device):** The term *paradox* is from the Greek word *paradoxon*, which means "contrary to expectations, existing belief, or perceived opinion." It is a statement that appears to be self-contradictory or silly, but which may include a latent truth. It is also used to illustrate an opinion or statement contrary to accepted traditional ideas. Ex.: "All animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others" (*Animal Farm*, Orwell).

6. **Pun (literary device)**: a play on words that produces a humorous effect by using a word that suggests two or more meanings, or by exploiting similar sounding words that have different meanings. Humorous effects created by puns depend upon the ambiguities the words entail. For instance, in the sentence, "A happy life depends on a liver," the word *liver* can refer to the bodily organ, or simply a person who lives.
7. **Deus Ex Machina (literary device)**: an unexpected power or event saving a seemingly hopeless situation, especially as a forced plot device in a play or novel.
8. **Aestheticism (Philosophy)**: late 19th-century European arts movement which centred on the doctrine that art exists for the sake of its beauty alone, and that it need serve no political, intellectual, or other purpose. Wilde's Philosophy: **Art for Art's Sake**. \*Read the Preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.
9. **Hedonism (Philosophy)**: the ethical theory that pleasure (in the sense of the satisfaction of desires) is the highest good and proper aim of human life.
10. **Dandy**: A man excessively devoted to style, neatness, and fashion in dress and appearance.
11. **Bunbury**: The term bunbury + -ing was invented by Oscar Wilde in *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895) after Bunbury, the fictitious invalid friend of the character Algernon whose supposed illness is used as an excuse to avoid social engagements. To bunbury is to have a second/secret identity and to go away with a made up excuse in order to have an adventure that your society does not approve of.
12. **Verbal, Situational, and Dramatic Ironies**.