

## Metaphor: The Conceit

Metaphors come in all shapes and sizes. One popular form from the past but still in use among poets is the conceit. Think of the conceit as a form of hyperbole--an exaggerated comparison. When a poet forces you to stretch the comparison by using extremes as his elements: the tenor and the vehicle, you must activate and energize your imagination. The greater the distance between the tenor and the vehicle, the harder the work on the reader's part "catch" the meaning or intention.

At their best, conceits are literary puzzles the solving of which leads to great intellectual satisfaction. At their worst they are fluffy nonsense, yielding a groan like dad joke.

### Sonnet 130

-- William Shakespeare

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;  
Coral is far more red than her lips' red;  
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;  
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.  
I have seen roses damasked, red and white,  
But no such roses see I in her cheeks;  
And in some perfumes is there more delight  
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.  
I love to hear her speak, yet well I know  
That music hath a far more pleasing sound;  
I grant I never saw a goddess go;  
My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground.  
And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare  
As any she belied with false compare.

