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Heaney in love

by [Adam Kirsch](#)

On the love poetry of Seamus Heaney.

It may be too sweeping to say that modern poetry is unhappy poetry, but it is certainly true that modern poems about marriage are almost always about unhappy marriages. The catalogue might begin with the hopelessness of Hardy's "We Sat at the Window": "Wasted were two souls in their prime,/ And great was the waste, that July time/ When the rain came down." Then there is the panicky pillow-talk of "The Waste Land": "What are you thinking of? What thinking? What?" And the sexual brutality of Lowell's "To Speak of Woe That Is In Marriage": "Oh the monotonous meanness of his lust .../ It's the injustice ... he is so unjust—/ whiskey-blind, staggering home at five./ My only thought is how to keep alive." Nor do things look any better from a woman poet's point of view, whether we are listening to Marianne Moore, who never married—"the spiked han ...

Adam Kirsch's most recent book is *Invasions: Poems* (Ivan R. Dee).

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