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Christopher Pugh

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# Christopher Pugh

## Robert Lowell, *Life Studies*, and the Father Poetry of Michael Hofmann

‘It is a little-remarked feature of the younger generation of British poets’, wrote Blake Morrison in 1987, that

the relationship which most concerns them is not that with a lover or spouse, not with a particular place, not with society at large, nor with God (those traditional concerns of poets) but rather the relationship with parents [...] and fathers seem to figure more largely than mothers. [...] No other poetic generation one can think of has *collectively* been so obsessed with its parents as the present one’.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps coincidentally, Stanley Kunitz, also in 1987, pre-empted Morrison when he noted the development of ‘the father-and-son poem, as written from the perspective of the son’.<sup>2</sup> Although concentrating exclusively on American poetry, Kunitz accords with Morrison about the unprecedented rise in the genre from the mid-century but, despite writing after the publication of major British father poem sequences from Tony Harrison, Hugo Williams and Michael Hofmann, claims the genre for America:

Isolated examples may be found elsewhere in contemporary literature (witness Dylan Thomas’s eloquent villanelle), but the unique proliferation of the theme in our own country suggests that it is an authentic cultural manifestation (Kunitz 36).

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1. ‘The Filial Art: A Reading of Contemporary British Poetry’, *YES*, 17 (1987), 179–217 (179, 216).
  2. ‘The Poet’s Quest for the Father’, *New York Times*, 22 February 1987, Book Review, 1, 36–7 (36).