In his book on Modernism, Peter Childs sums up David Lodge's ideas about the significance of using metaphors and metonymies in twentieth-century British poetry: “The socially aware political writers of the 1930s favoured metonymy while the late Modernists, such as Beckett, Lowry and Lawrence Durrell, staged a recovery for metaphor before the down-to-earth postwar authors (such as Philip Larkin, Kingsley Amis, John Wain) once more championed a realist style.” As I have pointed out in the previous chapters, Larkin emphasized the mimetic function of poetry; the sparing use of metaphors and his preference for metonymy was only one manifestation of his ambition to write a kind of poetry in which what is in the poem is more relevant to the reader than the poem itself. Lodge’s outline of three generations (the Oxford poets of the Thirties, the late Modernists of the Forties/Fifties and the Movement poets) calls attention to the importance of the connections between the Thirties and the Movement: when rejecting late Modernism, the poets of the Sixties tended to seek their predecessors in the Thirties. W.H. Auden was particularly significant in shaping Larkin's poetics.

In a book review Larkin wrote that Auden was “not only one of the century's major poets but one of its most complex characters”. Although this seems to be a cliché (probably all major poets are complex characters), it is still relevant in Larkin's poetics. He emphasizes complexity, which is a word he uses in reference to experience in the “Statement”. Reading Auden, no doubt, was one of his fundamental experiences and, paradoxically, this literary experience helped him develop his poetics of non-literary literature (another paradox).

---

2 Larkin, *Further Requirements*, 282.
Two poets and two generations
Both Auden and Larkin are frequently seen as the emblematic figures of their respective generations: the Thirties and the Movement. Although Larkin was fifteen-years younger, they were still contemporaries: when Auden died in 1973, Larkin had already written most of his major poems (his last volume was published in 1974). Although the two poets met only twice,³ Auden was definitely a father figure for Larkin, offering possible answers to his questions and dilemmas. Larkin's experience of reading Auden is as complex and dynamic as the older poet's character: it ranges from Larkin's admiration of Auden in the 1940s, through a rejection of Thirties poetry and a vision of Auden's work as a composite and controversial whole.

It follows from the emblematic position of the two poets that any feature one points out in their poetics will almost automatically be taken as a metonymy of their generations – it is another question whether such generalizations are justifiable or falsifying. Still another question is whether these generations can be seen as cohesive movements with leading figures at the centre. Although the acronym “MacSpaunday” is often used in reference to Louis MacNeice, Stephen Spender, Auden and Cecil Day Lewis, they did not form a coherent group. In a review of MacNeice's letters David Wheatley observes:

[Auden's] correspondence with MacNeice is represented here by a solitary letter (and one, later letter from Auden to MacNeice). Nor are there any letters to Spender, Day-Lewis (so much for MacSpaunday) or Isherwood.⁴

Spender also said in a public lecture (University of East Anglia, 18 October 1988) that it was not until 1957 that Auden, Day Lewis and he were in the same room for the first time. The term “Movement” for Larkin's generation is even more controversial. Nevertheless, when Blake Morrison published his monograph entitled The Movement (1980), he gave it the subtitle English Poetry and Fiction of the 1950s, making it clear that he identified the Movement as the mainstream of the period.

³ Larkin, Selected Letters, 524.