



21 May 2009

09/34

AUDEN MANUSCRIPT DISCOVERED AT BFI

A researcher working at the BFI National Library has discovered an original manuscript in **W.H.Auden**'s hand, previously unknown to Auden scholars. The discovery was made by **David Collard** who was going through papers catalogued as part of the **Ivor Montagu** collection and these verses have never before been published. It represents a rare addition to the Auden canon. Full text of the verses and article by David Collard can be found in the TLS (Times Literary Supplement) published 21st May 2009.

To celebrate this discovery a special evening event at BFI Southbank on 8 June 2009, 6.15pm NFT2 will feature actor Simon Callow reading the Auden versions of the songs at a screening of *Three Songs of Lenin*. This will be the first time that Auden's words have been presented along with the film since the first screening in 1935. Two other films from the original Film Society programme will also be featured: Len Lye's *Kaleidoscope* (1935) and Cavalcanti's *Coal Face* (1935).

The three pages of the newly discovered manuscript contain Auden's interpretation of two songs in **Dziga Vertov**'s film *Three Songs of Lenin* (1934) which idolise their subject:

*We never looked upon his face
We never heard his voice
Yet closer than a father he
Much closer to us was*

*No father for his children did
What Lenin did for us"*

extract from Song 1.

Auden's versions of the anonymous songs are copyright by the Estate of W. H. Auden and printed by permission.

Vertov's film is a characteristically bold series of montages celebrating the achievements of the Russian revolutionary and statesman using archive and original footage set to Russian folk songs. **Ivor Montagu**, a dedicated Communist who ran the

(London) Film Society had prepared a literal translation from the Russian intertitles and asked Auden to turn this text into something more poetic for a screening of the film at the New Gallery, Regent Street on 27th October 1935. Montagu's papers were given to the BFI in 1985 and fully catalogued shortly after. For the third song only Montagu's original translation survives in typescript. The programme note for the screening says "The Society thanks Mr. W.H. Auden for kindly advising on the English rendering of many passages in the songs."

Within the Special Collections of the BFI National Library the Auden manuscript was listed as relating to *Three Songs of Lenin* but its importance to Auden scholarship was not fully appreciated by its original cataloguers.

Auden's involvement with film at this period is well known and celebrated. His collaboration with **John Grierson** and the GPO Film Unit resulted in films such as **Alberto Cavalcanti's** *Coal Face* (1935) for which Auden wrote a madrigal and most famously *Night Mail* (1936) with his words set to music by **Benjamin Britten**.

Note to editors: The BFI National Library was set up in 1935. Special Collections contain the papers of more than 600 individuals and organisations including **Powell & Pressburger, David Lean, Michael Balcon, Joseph Losey, Derek Jarman** and **John Schlesinger**.

Press contacts:

Brian Robinson, Communications Manager, Archive & Heritage, BFI

Tel: 020 7957 8940

Brian.robinson@bfi.org.uk

or

Rachel Cook, Communications Co-ordinator

020 7957 4833

Rachel.cook@bfi.org.uk

There's more to discover about film and television through the BFI. Our world-renowned archival collections, cinemas, festivals, films, publications and learning resources are here to inspire you.