

Andrew Shelley

## THE RED BALLOON

the red balloon is my film  
only friend to the outcast child

his counterweight to heaven  
his gift and joy his compensation

for ancient infantile childhood sorrow  
no matter if he's bullied berated

laughed at and neglected or  
that women whisper at him in the distance

he's happy always he walks the streets  
buoyed up brave and bare in naked feet

his sphere of air his other head  
held high his hoping self his bit of me

his single unaffected tear his  
blessedness his absence from the breast

his captivated inflated sigh  
suspended sunrise abstracted breath

his enveloping withheld caress  
wound round his wrist with twine

shining above him marking  
his progress his advent in time

his being there through the days the years  
of ancient unassuageable

infant sorrow childhood pain  
and then one terrible yellow afternoon

on an eternal street corner they  
justle if from him jealous

of his grasping that one paltry thing  
that's his because they trouble him

it dies far away seek how he may  
stilled against a wall sighing circling

in dwindling flurries expiring  
past all mending at last surrendering

finally ending like a dying sun gasping for him  
collapsing in a spilt pool of slack

plastic scar tissue shrunk to puffy skin  
to some grief within it's not there anymore

as if it never was he weeps and so he crawls  
crying through the streets crumpled

up face disgraced in hands he wants to die  
(some people love a red balloon

such real illusory small important things  
they lure to kill less worse if they burst)

until a flock of technicolour dreamballoons  
come rushing to take him in lift him high

above the red-tiled roofs the rain-damp  
alleys and far and wide away FIN

My film was always the red balloon  
or so I thought until

one grim day I realized  
that mine I would always sacrifice

trying to fit in with the bullies  
and the boors and succeeding I

popped my plump balloon long ago  
and instead of others hitching me

up above the garret windows of the slate-grey  
roofs and rain-drenched houses a thousand

heavyweights came to fix me by the shanks  
to the bare and lurid concrete prison floor

until I gored them free and went to walk  
and found my dead balloon gawping

back at me in a pool of slaughter  
& I wept a thick black lake of tears

& I poured a sunrise into a sunset  
I gasped my fears into the murdered suicide balloon

of acrid air that quickly grew again  
monstrous and so swiftly I pricked it

my drop of outcast blood  
my cattlebrand of pain my curse of cain

and then a multitude of dark balloons  
came to raise me up above the streets

and dropped me like a seed into the sea  
let me fall like the sun over the horizon

their bomb of love their dying prey  
their silhouette of hate their corpse of remorse

I drowned and was reborn  
hoping inside this red balloon

for centuries lost until  
shot down I rose again was me at last

grown up inside my head  
the red balloon still floating