The Russian writer Andrei Bitov is best known in the West for his novel *Pushkinskii dom*, which was first published in the United States in 1978 and which did not appear in his own country until 1987. Bitov has in fact been writing since roughly 1958 and during the late 1960s and early 1970s enjoyed a sizeable following owing to his psychologically insightful short stories and so-called “travel sketches.” Although his career suffered a major setback in the early 1980s, partly as a result of his involvement in the *Metropol* scandal, under *glasnost* Bitov’s fortunes have steadily improved and his writings are again being widely published.

Bitov’s early reputation in the Soviet Union was based to a considerable degree on his 1961 story “Bol’shoi shar” (The Big Balloon), which was also the title work of his first published collection. The story takes place in Leningrad just after the Second World War.
and chronicles the fascination of a little girl named Tonia with a red balloon. Since its appearance "Bol'shoi shar" has attracted a fair amount of critical attention, primarily because of its impressionistic tone and in particular the aura of childlike perception that pervades the work. M. Romenets, for example, notes that Tonia's point of view helps adults "to see the broad panorama of life, to understand its truth and depth," while A. Turkov praises what he considers "Tonia's ability to see a miracle in the everyday." Nor is this viewpoint limited to Soviet critics. Priscilla Meyer, for instance, writes that in "Bol'shoi shar" the reader is presented with "the purity and vividness of a child's vision, told with fairy-tale simplicity." Similarly, Stephen Hagen observes that in this story Bitov "portrays the natural beauty of a private and emotional moment in the life of a child."

Aside from a general consensus on this one point, however, little else has been written about "Bol'shoi shar." To date, the only attempt

214, Aptekarskii ostrov (Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel', 1968), pp. 5-23, Voskresnyi den' (Moscow: Sovetskaia Rossiia, 1980), pp. 9-21) and, most recently, Povesty i rasskazy (Moscow: Sovetskaia Rossiia, 1989), pp. 21-32. A translation by Phyllis Lee (in which the heroine, Tonia, has been rechristened Asya, presumably to give the appearance of unity with several other stories in the volume) can be found in the collection of Bitov writings entitled Life in Windy Weather: Selected Stories, edited by Priscilla Meyer (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1986), pp. 23-33. Citations in this article are to the text contained in the Bol'shoi shar edition. All translations are my own.

5. In many ways the story is reminiscent of Albert Lamorisse's 1956 film La Ballon Rouge. The film features a number of similarities with "Bol'shoi shar." For example, the boy Pascal, like Tonia, is an orphan and lives with his grandmother. There are several scenes involving the balloon's entrance and exit via a window which recall the actions of Tonia's balloon toward the end of Bitov's story. Finally, Pascal and the balloon are chased by street children (who eventually destroy the sphere), just as Tonia and her balloon are pursued by the boys in the park.

6. Compare again with La Ballon Rouge, the primary purpose of which, according to a contemporary review, was to render "what the eyes of a child see" (ce que voient les yeux de l'enfant (Roget Boussinot, L'Encyclopédie du Cinéma [Paris: Bordas, 1967], p. 111).


