

Le Ballon Rouge

("The Red Balloon")

France : 1956 : dir. Albert Lamorisse : Montsouris

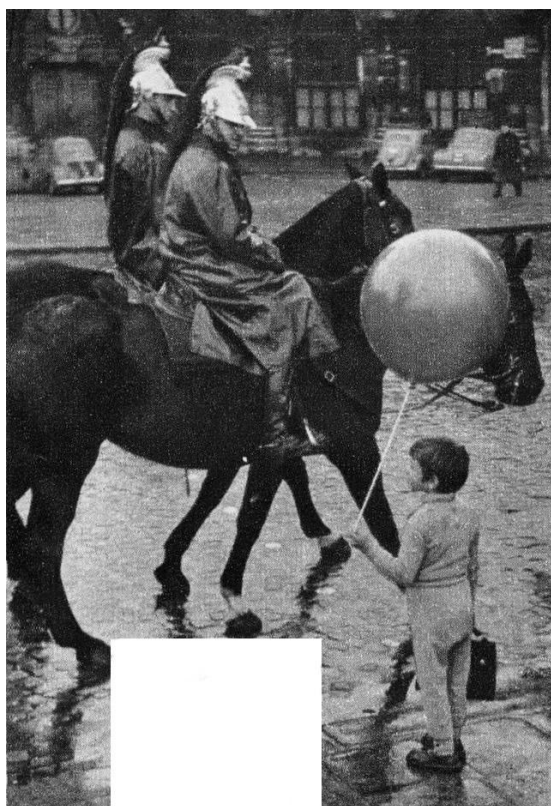
: 36 min

prod: : scr: Albert Lamorisse : dir.ph.: Edmond Séchan

[Pascal Lamorisse](#); [Sabine Lamorisse](#)

Georges Sellier; Maurice Le Roux

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω	8	€	M	⚡	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
6120	2.5	8	2	1,414	-	-	-	-	-	No	Pre 1984



Two miserable grainy stills are all I have found to date from this charming, bittersweet little gem. Don't miss it.

Sources: (left) Picture Show Annual 1958; (right) A Pictorial History of the Talkies

Halliwell's Film Guide review:

"A lonely boy finds a balloon which becomes his constant companion and finally lifts him to the skies. Absorbing and quite perfectly timed fantasy, one of the great film shorts. Academy Award: Best Original Screenplay **** "

Speelfilm Encyclopedie review:

"Pascal tames a red balloon in Ménilmontant and it becomes his friend, but Pascal's jealous little friends grab the punctured balloon following a pursuit through the streets. At that moment all the balloons of Paris come to Pascal and he flies away with them. A poetic fantasy, enchanting but so serious that the children in Lamorisse films never laugh, or smile in their visions ("CRIN BLANC"), and that makes this children's director so singular. Alienation and daydreaming are well done. *** "

Bloomsbury Foreign Film Guide review:

"On his way to school one morning, a little boy comes upon a balloon hanging round a lamppost. The balloon seems to have almost human powers of communication, takes a fancy to the child and attaches itself to him until the sad event that ends its life. A whimsical, imaginative and thoroughly delightful fantasy which received a standing ovation at Cannes when it was first seen. It passed into the small and select canon of well-remembered and much-loved short features, continuing to enchant adults and children alike ever since. There is no dialogue as such, only random voices, street sounds and music, and the film was shot in an old quarter of Paris in soft hues of blue and grey against which the bright red balloon shines – a symbol of dreams and a poignant reminder of the cruelty of those who destroy them."

The Critics' Film Guide review:

"A lonely boy (Pascal Lamorisse) makes friends with a balloon. Whimsical and sentimental, but it's also beautifully photographed and a touching metaphor for the freedom and innocence [sic] of childhood. A classic short film. 6/10 "

Anti:

"Lamorisse always makes the same film... He refuses to take advantage of the facilities of the studio; he refuses also to clearly define his subject... The script, if that's the right word, is only an idea, a point of departure."

– Jean d'Yvoire, **Télérama**

Pro:

"Thirty minutes of cinema magic – I declare this picture a small masterpiece... a work of art... a superb poem in colour."

– Fred Majdalany, **Daily Mail**

"A delightful film that will touch the heart of everyone." – **News (& Garbage) of the World**

"[It] moved me to laughter and tears... [and] will be remembered when many full-length pictures are forgotten." – **Daily Mirror**

"In 35 touching minutes Lamorisse makes the red balloon live. His film is unlike anything you have seen before and unforgettable."

– Anthony Carthew, **Daily Herald**

"Officially for children but a special treat for adults too, it's in beautiful colour and epitomises just the kind of offbeat movie gem which is ideal for television." – **Judith Crist**

The Good Film and Video Guide review:

"A small boy floats through the air with the greatest of ease, courtesy of a large red balloon. The air is that above Paris, whose grey rooves glitter below in the sunlight. Audiences everywhere loved this movie, which remains enchanting. *** "

Radio Times Guide to Films review:

"The first dialogue-less film to receive an Oscar nomination for its screenplay since the silent era (it went on to win), Albert Lamorisse's simple fable about the unique friendship between a lonely boy and a vibrant red balloon remains one of the most enchanting children's films ever made. Responding with adorable naturalism to his father's direction, Pascal Lamorisse seems lost in awe at the mischievous balloon's ingenuity as it follows him across Paris and into his classroom. The triumph of loyalty and love over envy and cruelty is a weighty message for such a slight tale. But Lamorisse carries it off magnificently with a joyous balloon-filled finale. **** "

Video Movie Guide 1993 review:

"This fanciful, endearing tale of a giant balloon that befriends a small boy in Paris is a delight for children and adults alike. Outside of a catchable word or two here and there, the film is without dialogue. The story is crystal clear in the visual telling, punctuated by an engaging musical score. ***** "

The International Encyclopedia of Film entry on Albert Lamorisse (1922-70):

"Born in Paris, France. Director. Best known for his medium-length films **"CRIN BLANC"** (1952) and **"LE BALLON ROUGE"** (1956), with their mixture of child-like charm and rather cloying sentimentality. He had a highly developed camera eye (with a fondness for fast

travelling shots) and the latter part of his career was devoted to perfecting a method of shooting from helicopters which achieved remarkable results in a feature, "**LE VOYAGE EN BALLON**" (1960), and several short films about France, full of breathtaking vistas of city and countryside seen from the air and shot in outstanding colour. His death in a helicopter accident deprived the cinema of a minor, yet distinctive, artist, whose camera innovations have influenced current photographic methods."

[no listing in "Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 2001", "The Cinema Book", "Classics of the Foreign Film", "Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89", "Rating the Movies (1990)", "The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on Television", "The Time Out Film Guide", "TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995", "Variety Movie Guide 1993" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]

An Oscar, a standing ovation at Cannes, "a small masterpiece", "one of the most enchanting children's films ever made" and still it does not rate a mention in most English film guides. Nor – despite the *Radio Times*' glowing testimonial – is it ever broadcast on British television, to children or anyone else. And just look at what they *do* broadcast...

More than twenty years since I last saw this, any detailed commentary would be inappropriate. I remember it as an utterly charming little piece with a deft, light touch that English-speaking fantasies involving small children have never matched. Actually I'd be concerned that watching it now, with a more jaded and cynical eye, its charm might not work. It is sufficient that it worked for me then, and evidently many critics felt the same.

The film's final sequence, as the grief-stricken child is born away into the sky by a flotilla of balloons, was not in my view a joyous, upbeat ending at all. Rather the film seemed to say he was too sensitive to live among human children, and was carried gently aloft to wherever balloons do their inflatable thing. The story is a touching little tragedy, and a "happy ending" would in any case have been inappropriate. When your beloved dog dies, you don't turn around and grab the next dog off the rack. If the balloon symbolises anything beyond a normal pet, it symbolises not "innocence" (yawwwn) but warmth. It is a heart, and when the other children spitefully trample on it, it is also the boy (symbolically) who dies.

In some sense, that final scene was mirrored in the end shot of "**CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE THIRD KIND**", where Richard Dreyfuss was the small boy who does not belong, and is born away into the sky by other friendly aliens. Also never to return. The parallels with "**E.T. THE EXTRATERRESTRIAL**" are less exact, but that too featured a lonely boy befriended by a magical alien, which is hunted by the less understanding, and sort of "dies". But it is E.T. (the balloon, then) which is carried off into the clouds, and not Elliot.

The three Lamorisse films cited above all featured son Pascal (in "**CRIN BLANC**" he played the toddler sister of Albert Emery). He's six here. Nothing else is known of sister Sabine. **Recommended.**

See subject index under **ALL IN THE FAMILY**, [BULLYING](#), [DIRECTORS](#), [FANTASY / FAIRY TALES / FOLK TALES](#), [OSCAR WINNERS / AWARD WINNERS](#), **RECOMMENDED**

TITLES, TOYS / DOLLS / MODELS and **SHORT FILMS** (although technically this falls outside the recognised short film category by its length).