The publishers have given *The Clam* an attractive format, with heavy coloured paper, distinctive print and line illustrations by children. *Beware the Quickly Who* is much more utilitarian, designed as a working script. It has sufficient omissions and misprints that the author's intention is occasionally not clear.

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Subtle Frivolity

GILBERT DROLET

Les Eléphants de Tante Louise, Roger Auget. Les Editions du Blé, Saint Boniface, 1974. Paper.

To review a play through a careful reading of the script is much like commenting upon the quality of a dish after assiduously studying the recipe but without actually tasting the result. It presumes a great deal.

In the case of *Les Eléphants de Tante Louise* the publishers have done their best to present us with an enjoyable experience. The cover by Roland Mahé, artistic director of le Cercle Molière, is reminiscent of the hippopotamus ballet sequence in Disney's classic *Fantasia.* Designed for use in the classroom, the text is followed by questions and word games devised to elicit added interest on the part of young students in the themes developed in the play. There are also Nicole Guyot's excellent photographs obviously taken while the play was in progress.

The idea for *Les Eléphants* originated with a television script by Marcel Sabourin entitled *Fantôme, Clowns et Citrouilles.* Le Cercle Molière expanded the T.V. scenario and staged it with moderate success in 1971. Encouraged to write a sequel retaining the same characters, Auger completed *Les Eléphants* in February 1972. It was staged in June and met with the unanticipated approval of large and enthusiastic audiences.

One of the obvious reasons for the play's success is that it observes the proven basic principles of contemporary children's theatre: a small cast (6) performing for an audience whose participation is essential if, in this case, minor. Moreover, simplicity of setting and scenery serves the double purpose of simultaneously focusing the spectator's attention upon the action and the characters

and of increasing the involvement of the imagination.

The tone is set before the play begins when we read this description in the "Personnages"—"Rudolff: un pachyderme de l'ordre des ongulés, du sous-ordre des artiodactyles: un hippopotame."

This sketch confirms that what is about to unfold is fraught with frivolity. By the end of the play, in fact, an impulsive reviewer might be tempted to categorically dismiss the whole effort as the creation of someone whose inspiration emanated solely from the minor Muses who animate any Saturday morning T.V. cartoon. But such an appraisal would belie the promise of the piece, a promise which is largely kept.

For the thoughts, words, and actions of the players reveal a broad range of subtlety far beyond the more obvious dramatic devices employed to grab and hold the attention of the audience. The latter help the child to situate himself and to stimulate his interest in people, places and events of his day. There are allusions to the Royal Winnipeg Ballet, Expo '67, the United Nations, bilingualism, Weight-Watchers, police states, modern technology and Rudolff, the aspiring ballet-dancing hippo, whose last name is Tutuyeff. A few puns are also included and one, in particular, would guarantee an explosion of laughter given the proper handling by the players. It occurs when Tomik, the brightest of the three youngsters, decides to sabotage Professor Clo-Clo's infernal machine. His two companions, Bourdon and Bouillotte, are the villain's prisoners and while Clo-Clo is in the wings looking for an advertising folder with which he hopes to convince Rudolff to enter the machine, Tomik appears on stage.

Bourdon	Re-voilà Tomil. Vite aide-nous, je dois rentrer chez-moi, ma maman m'attend.
Bouillotte	Chut . . . (A Tomik) Que feras-tu?
Clo-Clo	(En coulisses) Mais où ai-je mis cette lettre?
Bourdon	Qu'est-ce que c'est?
Bouillotte	Une bombe.
Bourdon	Une quoi?
Bouillotte	J'sais pas. C'est la bombe à Tomik. (39)

The less obvious elements of the play are what make it more challenging and it is, regrettably, doubtful if the nuances would be discernible to a young audience. The evident conflict is between the adult world and that of the child and the scales of sympathy are necessarily tipped in favour of the young.

Professor Clo-Clo is the power-mad scientist who exploits everything and everyone around him. Naturally, he is mistrusted and feared. Madame Rondo, his wealthy patroness, is a brazen name-dropper and social climber bent upon gaining the upper hand in an endless game of one-upmanship. She, too,

is an exploiter for she uses the professor to heighten her own social standing. Yet both are very insecure in that neither trusts the other and rightly so.

At one point Clo-Clo indulges in gossip, an area usually (and wrongly) thought to be strictly the province of women. "Cette madame Rondo est vraiment pénible. Sachez qu'il y a quelques jours a peine, j'ail su qu'en allant faire ses emplettes . . . (8)."

When she arrives on stage having heard part of the conversation, Clo-Clo covers up his indiscretion through fabrication. In the vein of melodramatic villains the adults are uniformly evil.

The characters of the children are unquestionably the most interesting. They are already victims marked by a society which imposes unreasonable demands upon them. Tomik, keen, resourceful and stubbornly independent, is too conscious of his image. His reputation as an intelligent boy is undermined by the fact that his lips move when he reads so that he shuns the company of others little realizing that his peers do not consider this a shortcoming. Bouillotte is caught up in the confusing world of new words. Bourdon is properly described as credulous and much of this is the result of his dependence upon his mother. Hence, each is condemned to play roles and must become immersed in the business of a pretense vital to growing up. Though not as savage as Betjeman's schoolboys, they are not as innocent as children are reputed to be. They are opportunistic, petulant, demanding and, in Bourdon's case, submissive and easily duped.

These nuances would pass unnoticed with many audiences, but perhaps that is as it should be, for *Les Eléphants* is primarily a humorous and rewarding romp through fantasy-land for pre-teens. There is no sugar-coated moral even at the end of the story when Bourdon reminds us that his mother had warned him not to play in Clo-Clo's garden, for if he had obeyed her, he, his friends and his audience would have missed all that excitement.

Le Cercle Molière, reputedly Canada's oldest surviving theatre group, plans to go on a two-month experimental tour of Manitoba schools this year. If the group is successful, a professional group may be established to perform other children's plays. Good luck to them.

Gilbert Drolet teaches Canadian Literature at College militaire royal de St-Jean and has published articles in several journals.