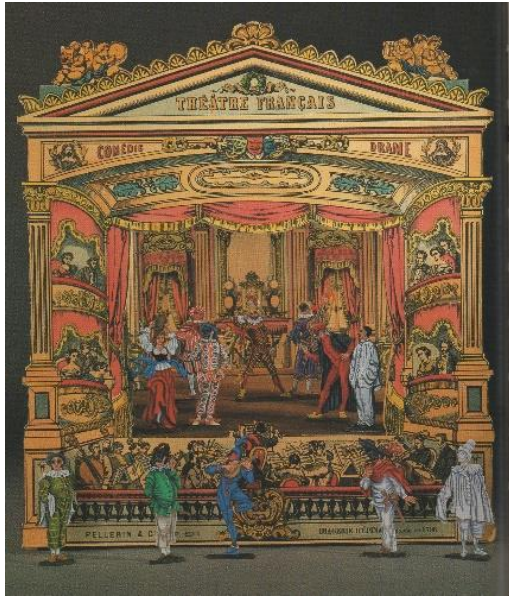L'Imagerie Francais and El Teatro de los Ninos. (Illustrations taken from the late Peter Baldwin's *Toy Theatres of the World.*)

French Toy Theatre is almost entirely known for one single name. The firm of Pellerin, printers, was established in the town of Epinal in northeastern France in 1796, printing cheap hand-coloured ephemera.

With the arrival of lithography in the mid nineteenth century, Pellerin started printing toy theatre sheets. Away from the centre of things in Paris, and with no local theatrical presence in the small town, there was no effort to draw upon any contemporary stage tradition. However, the company produced a remarkable number of stage fronts and scenes, even if they bore no relation to specific plays. By the 1930s, Pellerin's output included five different stage designs in various sizes, with scenery and characters to fit. The characters were all general in nature, 'Personnages et Costumes Variés'. Pellerin later issued shadow theatres, which were also very popular. The company is still in existence, although it has not published theatres since the Second World War.

However, Pellerin was by no means the only publisher of Toy Theatre. Other minor figures in France include Oliver Pinot, a former employee of Pellerin, who set up his own business in 1866, but was then bought out by Pellerin in 1888; F.C. Wentzel of Lorraine, a very early publisher from 1833, taken over by C. Burkhardt in the 1860s, and finally passed to R. Ackermann in 1918 who very soon ceased publishing. Another publisher was Didion in Metz, and his successors in Nancy, publishing from the 1840s. Other names are Hathenguel in Pont-a-Mousson, (from 1870), Glémarec (from 1845), and Boucquin (from 1862). It is noticeable that all these publishers were in the eastern part of France, close to the German border. Again, the sheets were mostly sold without playbooks.
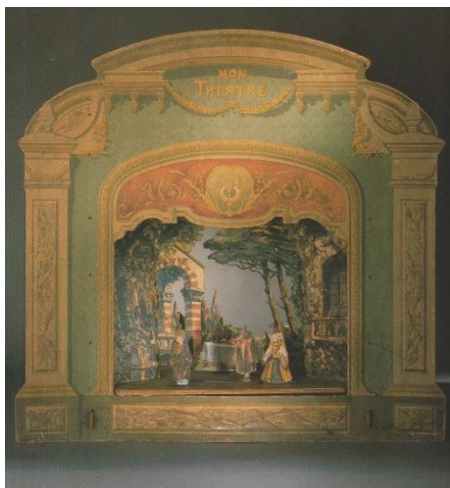

The sole representative of the trade in Paris was Albert Mericand, who published a fortnightly magazine format in 1904-5. Subscribers, over the run of the magazine, would have been able to construct elegant theatres such as this, with highly colourful and theatrical scenery and characters.

El Teatro de los Ninos in Spain is even more elusive than its French neighbour. There were two firms, both in Barcelona, the partnership of Seix and Barral, and Paluzie.

The partnership flourished from 1915 until 1942. In the 1920s Seix and Barral produced as many as 7 stage fronts, and 23 plays, with specifically designed characters and scenes for each theatre. A unique feature of the output was a translucent back-drop, with tissue paper inserts, which could be illuminated from the rear, creating striking lighting effects. The above scene is the Bridge of Sighs, for 'The Merchant of Venice'. Another unusual feature was that the stage had no stage floor. The characters had an extended foot-piece, which meant that the wire sliders were invisible to the audience, or at least as long as the stage was at eye level. Otherwise, as can be imagined, the effect would be very curious and untidy. The plays were published in several languages, including English, and were despatched with instructions for construction and performance, which even included entrance tickets!

Paluzie predated Seix and Barral by some forty years, starting publishing in 1870. He was very similar in style to German contemporary publishers. However, there are very few complete plays, and included are typical Spanish scenes of Bull-rings, and the Puerto del Sol de Madrid. Rather like the French publishers, he issued scenes and sheets of characters without reference to any set play, and did not include play-books. He continued publishing until 1939.
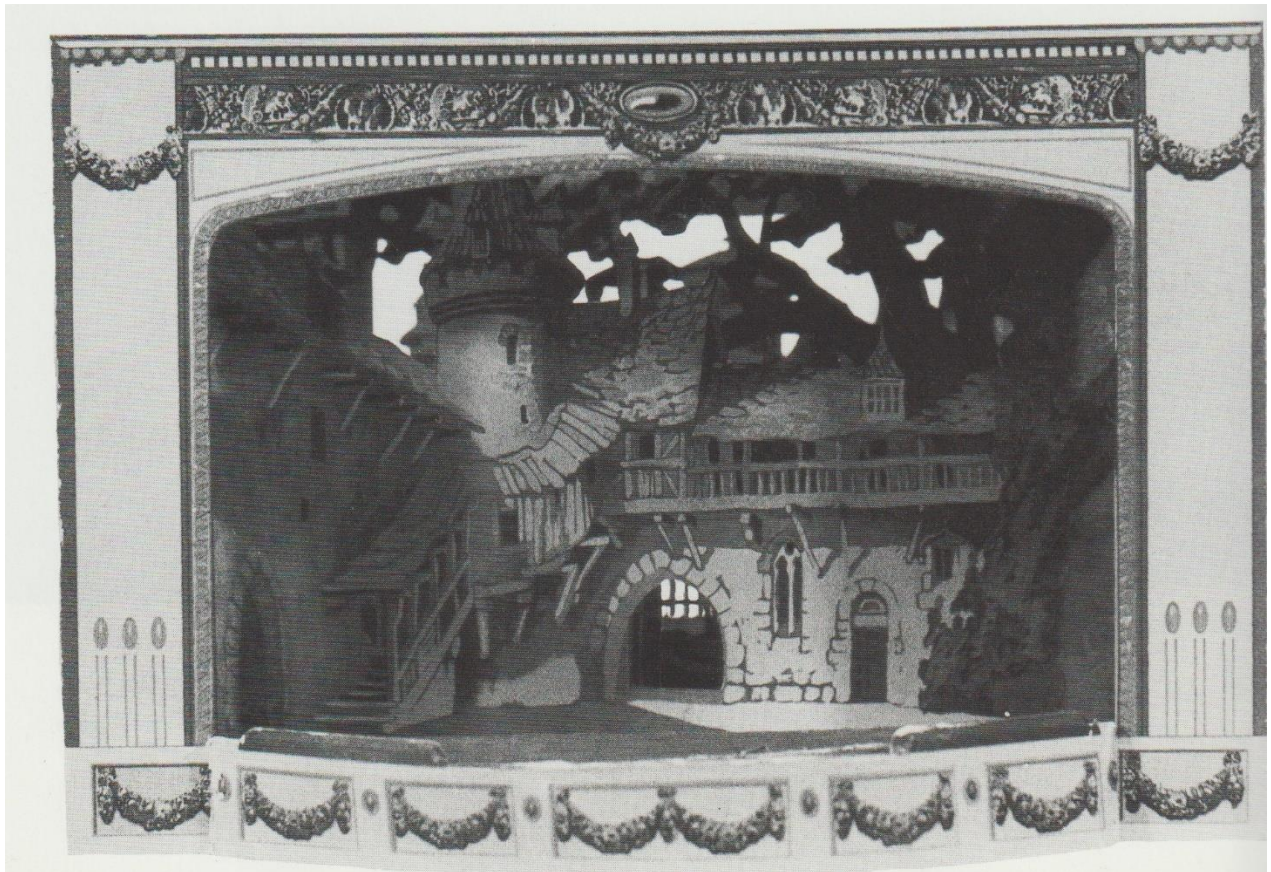
In Madrid, the appropriately named La Tijera (from 1917) published magnificent theatres and was reportedly the most prolific company as regards the production of Spanish toy-theatre plays. Unfortunately, I have been unable to find any further details or illustrations of this publisher's output. Any information or illustrations would be most welcome.