

Toy Theatres Then and Now



When I started my collecting in the 1980's I found myself drawn to toy theatres. I justified their inclusion in my collection by looking on them as a specialized form of dollhouses. I was pleased to be able to provide a few minor items to an exhibit of toy theatres in San Francisco in the 1980s, but I was also influenced by a much earlier experience.

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In the first decade of my childhood, I spent many Saturdays at the Cleveland Museum of Art where my father taught art classes. His room was up a very long staircase towards the back of the museum, and at the top I had to walk through a semi-dark room to reach his classroom. I loved going up to his room because the semi-dark room had a collection of theatre models from various times in history. My favorite was a model of the Globe Theatre. I never knew why these models were there, and I never saw anyone giving a tour of them or anyone else looking at them. But I loved them. So later when I discovered toy theatres and found that some of them reproduced the Globe, I became interested in learning more about them. (99% of the material shown in this article is from the Susan Quinlan Doll and Teddy Bear Library collection.)

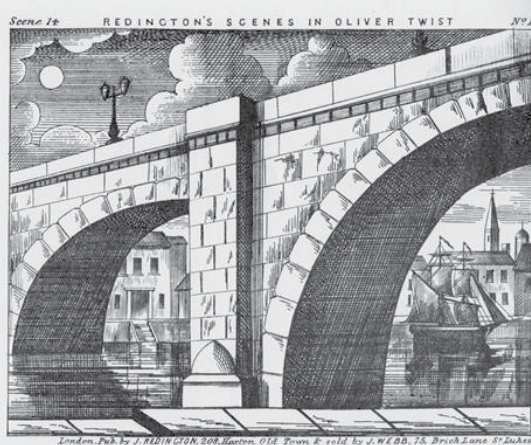
A BRIEF HISTORY OF TOY THEATRES

The Industrial Revolution in England in the early 19th century moved large masses of population from the country to the city, and the theatre became a primary form of entertainment for the people. These people wanted an escape from their monotonous jobs. Up to this time, the emphasis had been on intellectual and philosophical plays for the upper classes. Now the audience demanded plays inspired by the Romantic Movement that developed into melodramas and pantomimes. They were more interested in the settings and properties than the plot. Actors and actresses became popular, and pictures of them were purchased and hung in homes. Popular pictures of well-known actors published in the late 1700s eventually expanded to include the scenery and scripts until 1811 when the toy theatre kit was available for both children and adults to create at home. They included the stage with proscenium (part of the stage in front of the curtains), scenery, and characters of each depicted play. As the theatres got larger and parts of the audience were further from the action on the stage, the actors began to use increasingly dramatic poses. Scripts of popular theatre plays were available in print everywhere, as well as thousands of portraits of famous actors and actresses that people would hang on their walls. However, there is no documentation on the actual beginnings of the toy theatre. It is likely that someone decided not to put only the portrait of a single actor on a sheet, as was the custom, but the figures of all the actors of a play – thus creating a different type of memorabilia. It is also likely that a theatre enthusiast decided to cut the figures out, as one would have with dress-up paper dolls, and gave life to the characters in the process.

The toy theatre started in 1811 when William West produced a sheet of characters from a popular play. An early theatre is documented in the edition of a “build-your-own” theatre proscenium published in 1812 by I.K. Green of London. The theatre had several elements that were necessary to perform a play: a proscenium arch, which was often designed after that of existing theatres, set pieces, a backstage area, characters, and a play text. The characters were printed in their most dramatic attitudes and a variety of postures, which allowed the performer to make them evolve during the presentation. The text was a condensed and often bowdlerized version of the original play. Later on, color was added by the printers who, depending on the country of production, used different techniques, such as hand painting, stenciling, or lithography.

In the first half of the 19th century more than 300 popular plays were published in this format. While they were popular with adults, what I find fascinating is that they also became popular with children. Publishers sent artists to the various productions to make sketches of the sets and the actors, showing both their costumes and the dramatic poses they utilized. Young people were increasingly taken to see plays at the theatre, and if they liked the play, they could then buy a complete booklet giving them the opportunity to perform it at home. This process took time, as they first had to decide if they would buy the black and white version or the colored version. If they chose the first option, they would spend hours coloring all of the characters and settings. While it is probable that the colored versions would show more or less the actual colors used in the productions, the black and white versions could be colored in any way that the owner

wanted. Often other members of the family would assist in this task, making it a family affair.



After the sheets were ready, they were pasted onto cardboard and cut out. Then the child would have to become familiar with the text and also work out the movements of the characters on stage. They also became knowledgeable about parts of the theatre, such as the stage, the backdrops, and the wings. The scripts could be shortened to allow children to present a simpler version. And sometimes the enthusiastic presenter would get carried away as in this explosion from the book *Young Troublesome* in 1850. The size of the little theatre rarely exceeded 20 to 24 inches. The pictures were often extremely accurate representations of the costumes and scenery of popular melodramas and of pantomimes. As a result, there now are precise records of the English plays of the period. It seems to me that this was an incredible learning experience and perhaps is the reason why the theatre remained so important to these youngsters as they grew up.

Here is an early illustration of a child putting on a play his friends, and the second picture shows what happens when the presenter is carried away as depicted in this 1850 book called *Young Troublesome*, or *Master Jacky's Holidays* by John Leech. It seems that the play *The Miller and His Men* came with a small amount of gunpowder to create a more impressive explosion in one scene. Master Jacky seems to have added some gunpowder to the scene.



Many famous people admitted that they played with these theatres when young. A list of them includes:

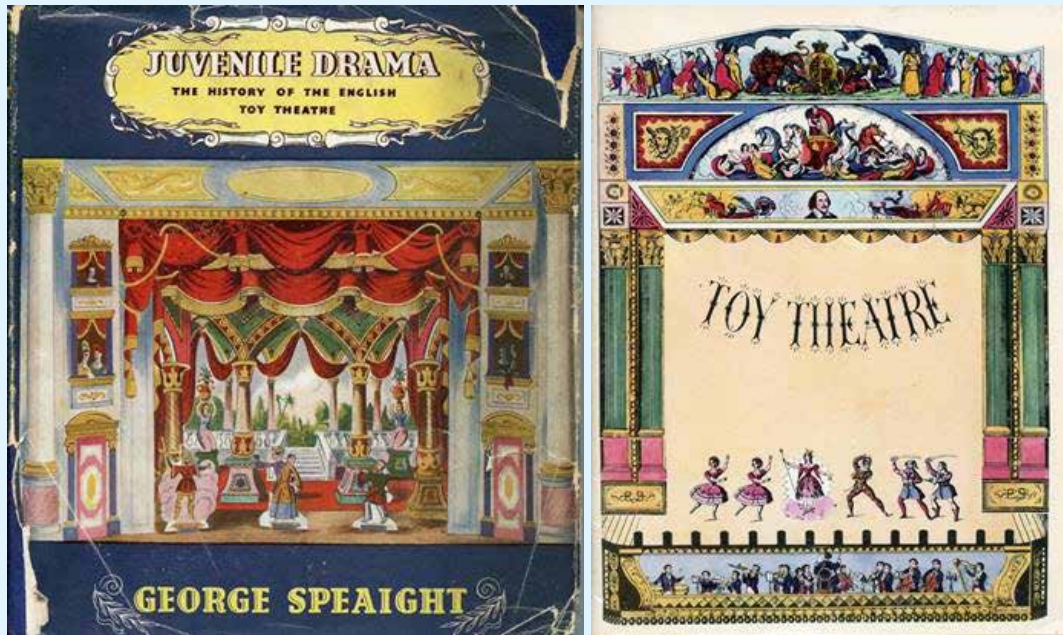
Hans Christian Andersen. Danish author.
Jane Austen. British author.
Edmund Bacon. American city planner.
Ingmar Bergman. Swedish film, stage and opera director.
Ed Brown. American producer of children's records.
Lewis Carroll. British author.
Winston Churchill. British statesman.
Jim Copp. American producer of children's records.
Edward Gordon Craig. British dramatist.
Charles Dickens. British author.
Thomas John Dibdin. British dramatist/songwriter.
Ian Falconer. American children's book author/illustrator/theater designer.
Ralph Fiennes. British actor.
Lynn Fontane. British actress.
John Gielgud. British actor.
W. S. Gilbert (William Schwenck). British dramatist/librettist.
Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe. German author.
Edward Gorey. American author.
Alfred Lunt. American actor.
Filippo Tommaso Marinetti. Italian poet/Futurist movement founder.
Ian McKellen. British actor.
Michel Ocelot. French author/animated film director.
Laurence Olivier. British actor.
Pablo Picasso. Spanish artist.
Andrew Selznick. American children's book author.
Edwin Smith. British photographer.

Robert Lewis Stevenson. British author.
 Ellen Terry. British actress.
 Andrew Lloyd Weber. British composer.
 Orson Welles. American actor and film & radio director.
 Oscar Wilde. British author.
 Jack Butler Yeats. Irish artist.
 William Butler Yeats. Irish poet/dramatist.
 Paul. Zaloom, American puppeteer/children's television host.

In 1884 Robert Lewis Stevenson, known for so many wonderful children's stories, also wrote a short article on the toy theatre titled *A Penny Plain and Twopence Coloured*. He described his experiences with the toy theatres that he was able to purchase and what they meant to him. Pollock's, a London publisher of toy theatre plays and scripts, has included this article in a number of their published scripts. But if you are interested in getting a copy, ask the seller if the entire article is included. Some list the title on the cover, but have only a brief description of the contents on the inside. This *Cinderella* has the entire article, but the *Children in the Wood*, while listing the title on the cover, actually presents the plays in five different languages and has only a one-page summary of the article at the back of the booklet.

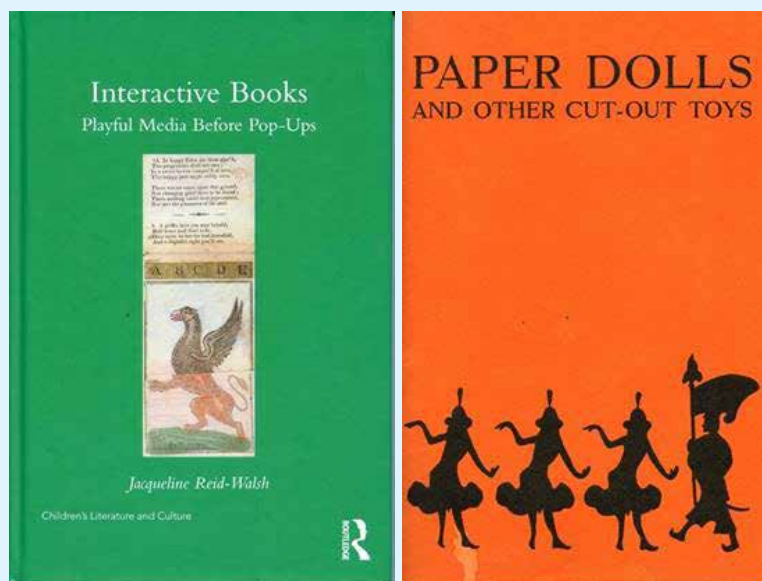


George Speaight was, throughout the 20th century, the living memory of this art. He performed, wrote, spoke at conferences and gave many artists the desire to know more about the micro-theatres. The below *Juvenile Drama* is his history of the English toy theatre. He also provided the first chapter of a book edited by Kenneth Fawdry for Pollock's titled *Toy Theatre*. His chapter, which originally appeared in the catalogue of the Toy Theatre Exhibition in 1977, provides a quick overview of history and the international scene.



Interactive Books: Playful Media Before Pop-ups by Jacqueline Reid-Walsh covers early interactive movable books that included both paper dolls and toy theatres. This book contains a chapter on each. A number of other interactive types of toy books are included as well.

Wilbur Macey Stone's *Paper Dolls and Other Cut-out Toys* is primarily focused on paper dolls, but it does contain a chapter on toy theatres that the author describes as “paper dolls for boys”.



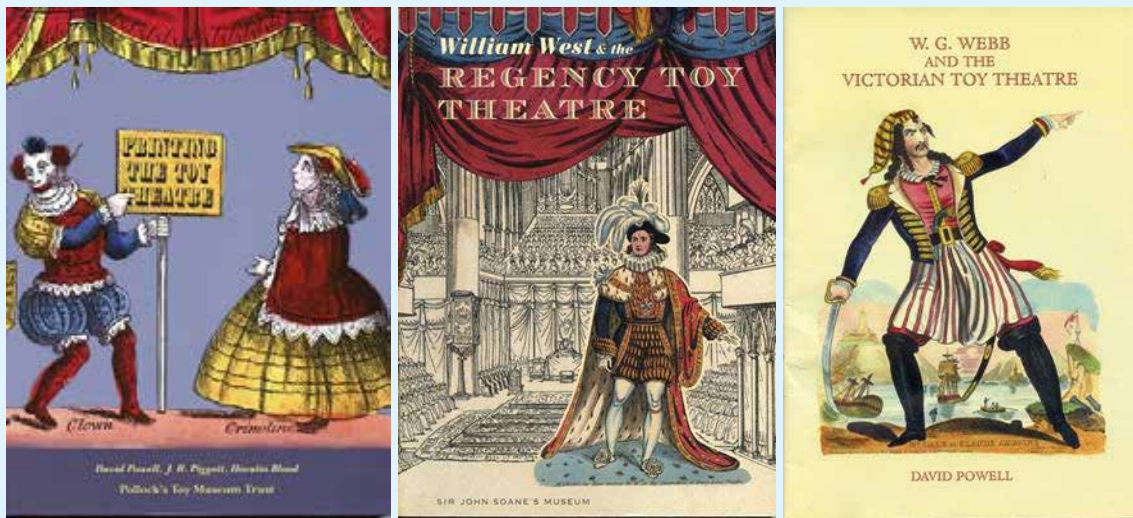
David Powell has written the following three excellent books on specific aspects of the toy theatre:

Printing the Toy Theatre. This book grew out of an exhibit by Pollock's that was at St. Bride Printing Library. It brings together information based on the few records remaining that cover the business of printing the toy theatre sheets. However examples of the sheets themselves as well as the plates used for the prints are still in existence.

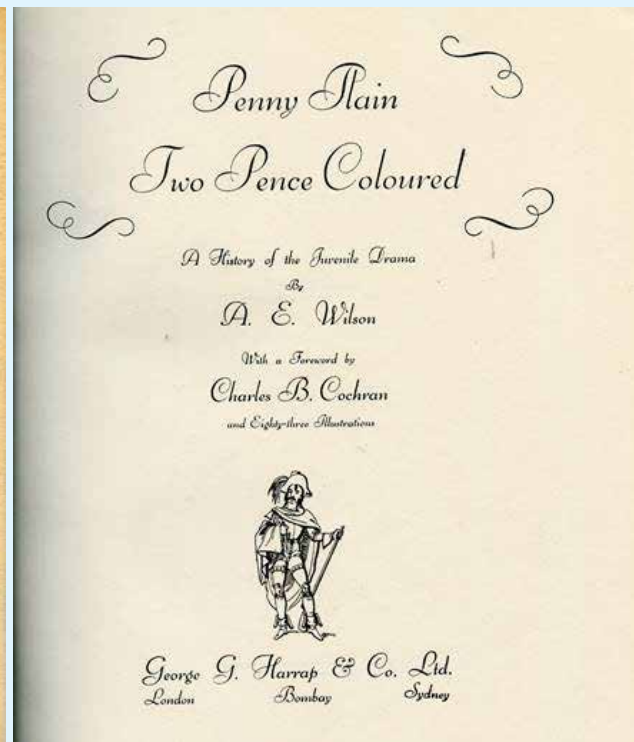
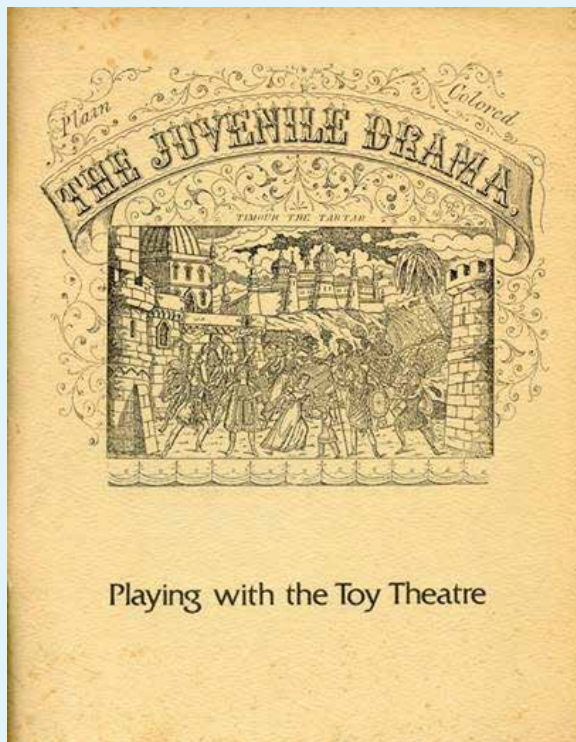
William West & the Regency Toy Theatre. The author reviews the history of William West who is credited with starting toy theatres in 1811 when West, inspired by contemporary children's prints called lottery

prints, produced a sheet of six characters from a popular play. His publications provided an insight into both theatrical architecture and the type of productions of the times, which were copied by many provincial theatre groups for their costumes and settings.

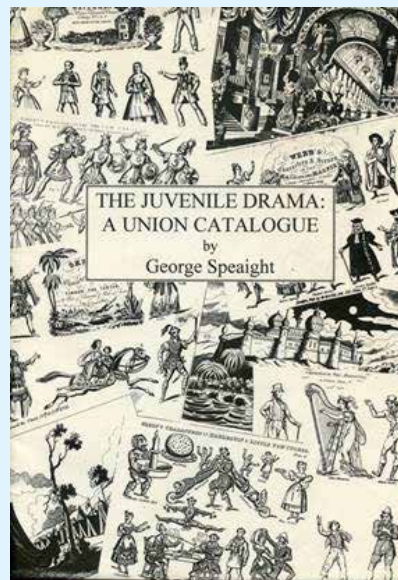
W. G. Webb and the Victorian Toy Theatre. This is a continuation of the history of the toy theatre starting in 1837. Queen Victoria's ascension to the throne seemed to divide the history of the toy theatre into two periods, Regency and Victorian. William West, who reflected the refinement of the Regency Theater was at the end of his career, and William Webb, whose work reflected the robust period of Victorian theater, was just beginning his. There is a list of Webb's plays and more information about the performances.



Joseph Viscomi wrote *Playing with the Toy Theatre* that was based on a traveling exhibit of toy theatres. Toy theatres gave insights into plays and stagecraft of its day. They were a combination of commercial art, a toy, and important historical documentation of the theatre. At the height of its popularity, more than 50 firms were producing the theatres. *Penny Plain Two Pence Coloured* by A. E. Wilson, published in 1932, is the earliest history book about toy theatre. The author had few written resources to use, so he spent time talking to some of the foremost collectors in the field as well as some of the early publishers including Benjamin Pollock and H. J. Webb. The book reflects not only the author's enthusiasm for the subject, but also the personal involvement and excitement of the collectors he interviewed and quoted in the book. The book has 83 illustrations, mostly black and white but a few are in color.



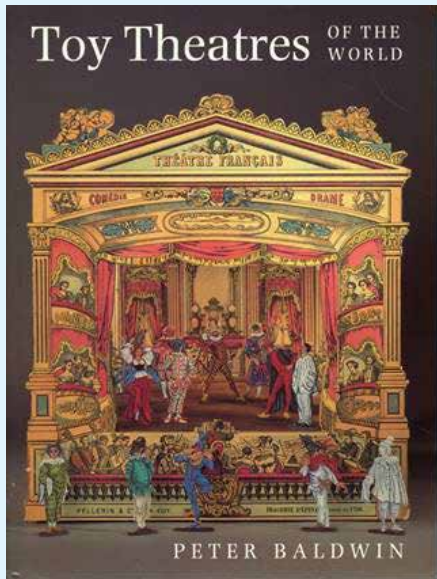
In 1999 George Speaight compiled *The Juvenile Drama: a Union Catalogue* that listed dramas available in eight libraries and came with over 300 titles. He suggested that one or two other collections were just being cataloged, so more may have come to light since he published this book. However it is a good place to start looking for existing plays by title.



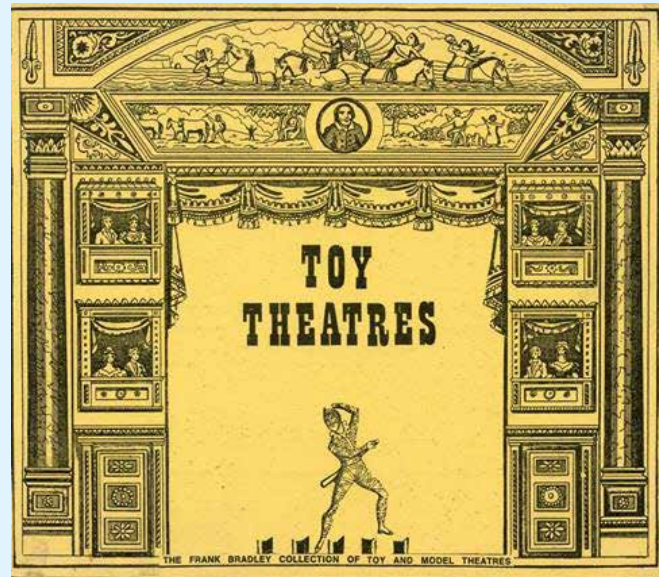
OTHER COUNTRIES

Of course toy theatres were produced in other countries due to the interest in the theatres had spread across 19th century Europe. Each country had a specific toy theatre tradition. In Austria, there were toy/paper theatres from the late 1820s including large ones published by the first editor of the genre in the country, Matthias Trentsensky, who published 52 plays. In Germany, the first paper theatres were published in 1830. Their publications included all the elements required to build a theatre, but each play had only one

sheet with characters depicted in only one position. The sets were probably used for several plays, and the theatres were not necessarily accompanied by texts of the plays. In France, many texts were published but they were not linked to the theatre. The owners had to come up with their own plays. There were few sheets with characters, no texts, and research in the field started late. However, the paper theatres were produced in remarkable quantities, especially by picture publishers from eastern France. In Denmark, the popularity of the toy theatres came later, and other countries started to produce their own theatres after importing foreign ones for a long time, for example, in Italy from 1883 and in Spain from 1870. In the former Czechoslovakia, the toy/paper theatre editors commissioned famous artists to create the plays for very large theatres using small wire puppets instead of paper characters. More information about international toy theatres can be found in these two books.



Baldwin, Peter. *Toy Theatres of the World*.

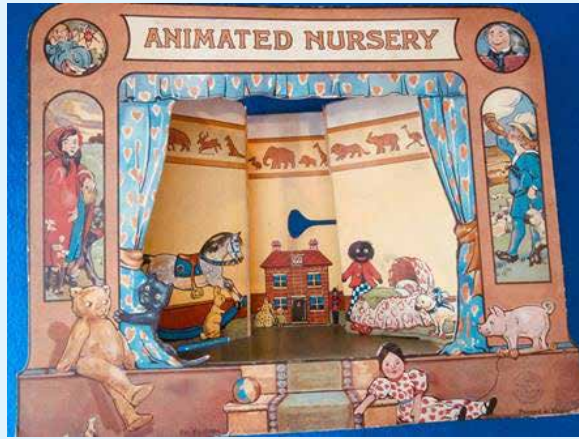


Bradley, Frank. *Toy Theatres*.

To conclude, although there were some toy theatres produced in the United States, the U.S. history of the toy/paper theatre is essentially that of a European editorial production that targeted amateurs such as children and their families. This theatre was never destined for professional actors, although in some provincial companies they were used to see what the original settings and costumes were like. They flourished until about 1850 in England, when the plays being written had less drama and more comedy, and eventually the theatre itself lost appeal and was no longer considered to be appropriate as a children's toy. The loss of movement and drama was reflected in the toy theatres being imported from Germany, and children no longer wanted to spend the amount of time necessary to cut out and construct the theatres.

20th CENTURY RENEWAL

Although toy theatres produced in the 19th century lost favor with their audience, they did not disappear. The toy theatre continued after the 1890s but was much less popular than it had been. They continued to appear in many different formats, and because of their adaptability to other areas, have actually survived until the present day in more modern uses. One example is the *Animated Nursery* created by a British company. Unfortunately the characters are damaged, but you can still get a sense of their colors and actions, and the wires used to project them onto the stage can be seen on the left and right of the characters.

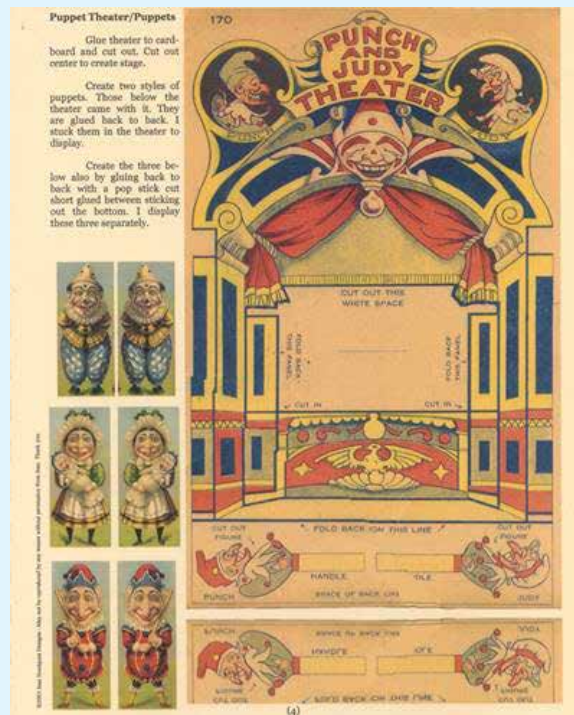


While looking for information on this toy theatre, I came across an article online that described another of Mathew's toy theatres and gave information about the company itself. It was written by Celia Thomas and Rebecca Green and is titled *Mathew's Animated Empire Vaudeville Toy Theatre ca 1920s-30s* <https://www.dollshousespastandpresent.co.uk/Magazine/Issue-9-May-2011/Page-4>

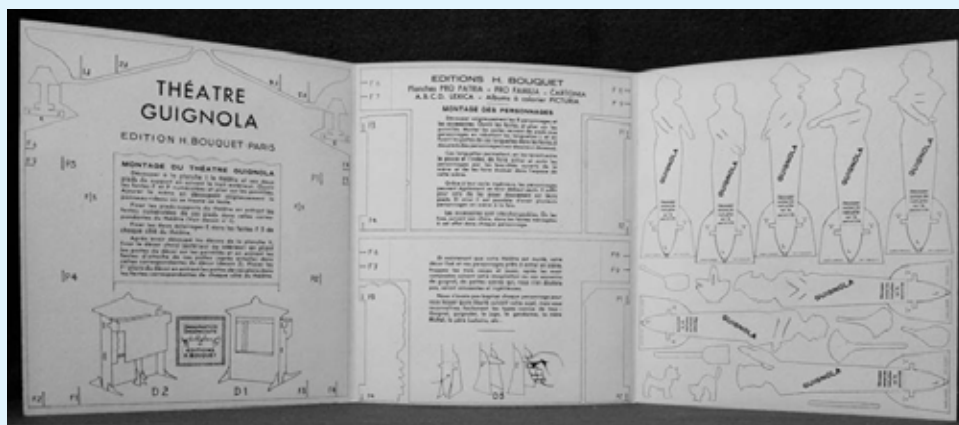


CLOSE RELATIVE OF THE PUPPET THEATRE AND THE CHARACTERS SOMETIMES REFERRED TO AS PUPPETS

Although some claim that the toy theatre was not closely related to the puppet theatre, there are occasions when the characters were referred to as puppets. One popular puppet story that utilized the toy theatre format was Punch and Judy.



A similar French character was Guignol. This version of a theatre was published as a folded pamphlet version with the theatre, characters and scenery on one side and the instructions on the other. Note also that the characters have their names printed on the back side.



Although it was called a marionette theatre, the book by Ditzzy Baker used characters that could be hung by a string and moved from above, but they could also be attached to a stick or cardboard strip and manipulated from the sides.



In the United States the revival of toy theatres since the 1990s has been done by puppeteers exploring traditional popular theatre techniques. Fritz Kannik continues to maintain his Kannik's Korner website (kannikskorner.com/toytheater/theaterlink.htm) that lists current toy theatre links by country plus theatres and plays that are currently for sale.

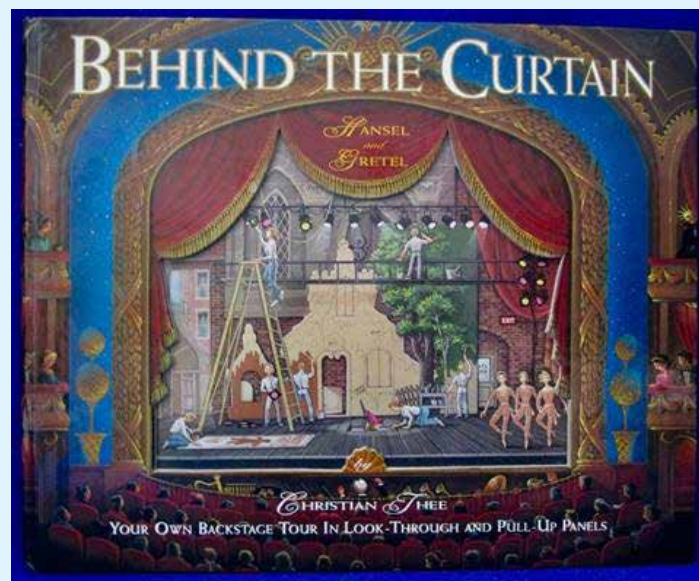
Artists brought it back to life, either by using old toy/paper theatres or by using the form to create contemporary performances. At the beginning of the 21st century, there were over 200 troupes worldwide using toy theatres although most use other types of stages as well. This new interest was also encouraged through some events dedicated specifically to the genre. These included the Preetzer Papiertheatertreffen in Preetz, Germany (every year), the Rencontres Internationales de Théâtres de Papier in Mourmelon-le-Grand, France (every two years), and Great Small Works' International Toy Theater Festivals in New

York City. Some publishers have been reprinting old theatres, and in Germany, *Papiertheater*, a beautiful magazine covering the tradition and the contemporary creation, is published.

The toy theatre has proven to be a valuable storytelling technique – easily taught in school and community settings and provides immediacy to new voices that want to be heard. It also offers possibilities for intricate and elaborate stage design, over-the-top acting, detailed narratives, and theatrical effects without the need for a million-dollar budget to portray grand tales told through inexpensive means.

Think of this as a teaching method today. For example, in high school a class studying a Shakespeare play could be broken up into groups. They would need to draw and color the characters and scenes, build a toy theatre, and create a shorter script. They would need to support why they cut parts out or why certain scenes were left in. Classroom time could be used to discuss why characters behaved as they did, etc. Then they would need to learn to manipulate the characters on the stage. Instead of a final exam, each group could present their version of the play. Some students might even get inspired to change a tragedy into a comedy, or vice versa. I think I would have come away from this class with a far greater understanding of the play than just reading parts of it every day, and I would have had a greater appreciation of the complexities of the theatre in general.

For the child who is interested in the theatre and what goes on behind the scenes, there is an interesting toy and movable book called *Behind the Curtain* by Christian Thee that shows these various activities. The first part of the book shows the various scenes from a production of *Hansel and Gretel*. The reader must pull up the curtain each time to reveal the scene. At the end there are several pages that show the behind-the-scenes and below the stage areas and what is being done there.



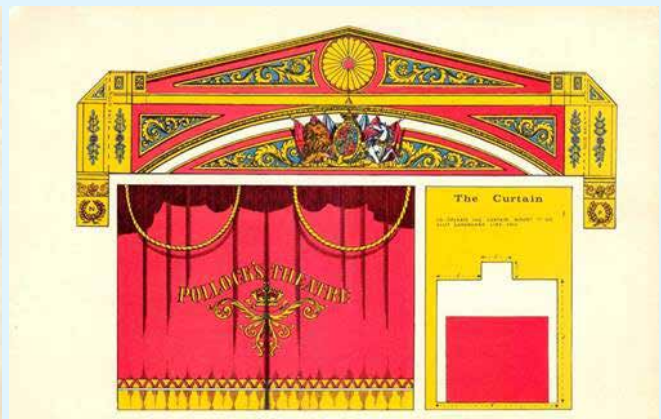
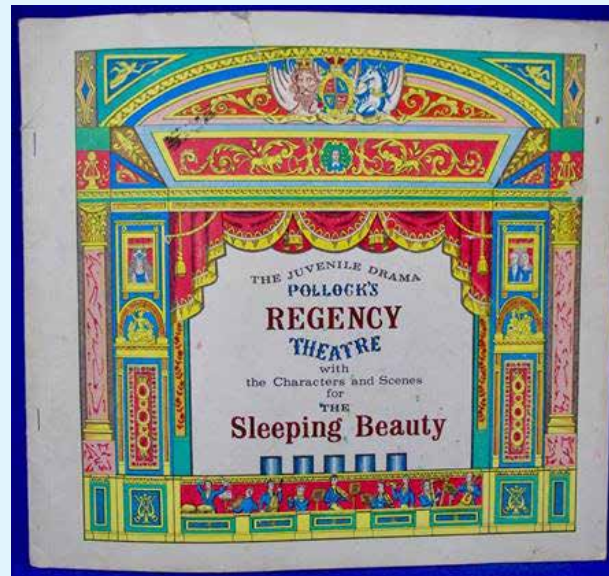
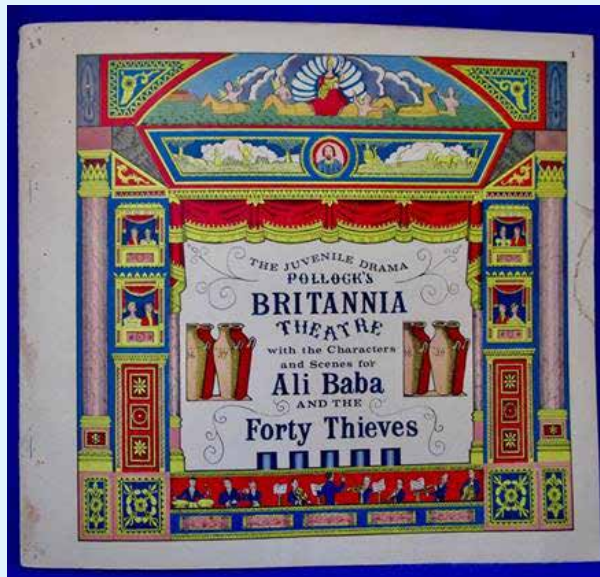
TOY THEATRE BOOKS AND KITS

For the child or adult who would like to make their own toy theatre, a number of kits and books are available that provide everything needed to create a stand-alone toy theatre. Purchasing the toy theatre presented a few decisions on the part of the purchaser. Not only do they have to decide on black and white or colored versions, but they also have to decide about the form of the theater itself. A number of the plays are published in a larger version that contains all of the required parts to make a theatre, while others are published with only scripts, actors, and settings that can be used in any theatre. After putting the theatre

together, the purchaser is ready to add more plays that can be performed.

Examples of those kits that included the theatre are:

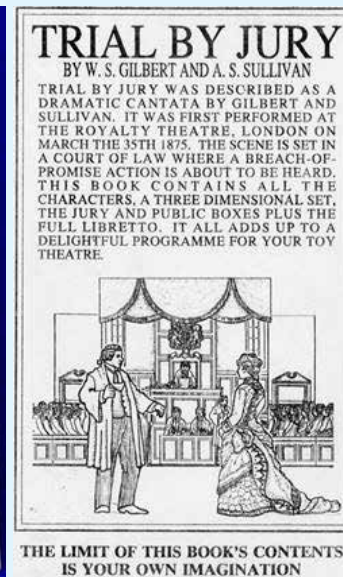
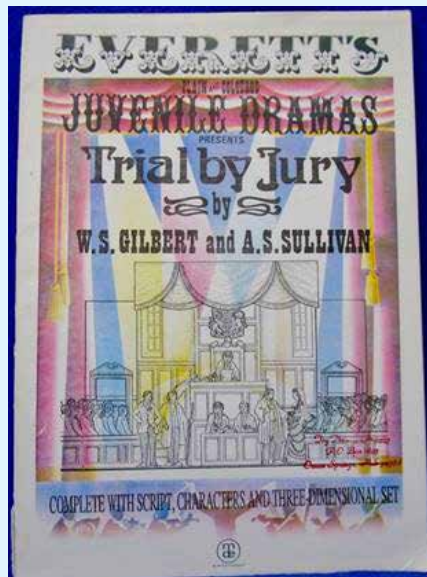




More recent examples were published by Michael Everett. Here is The Grand Theatre presenting *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.

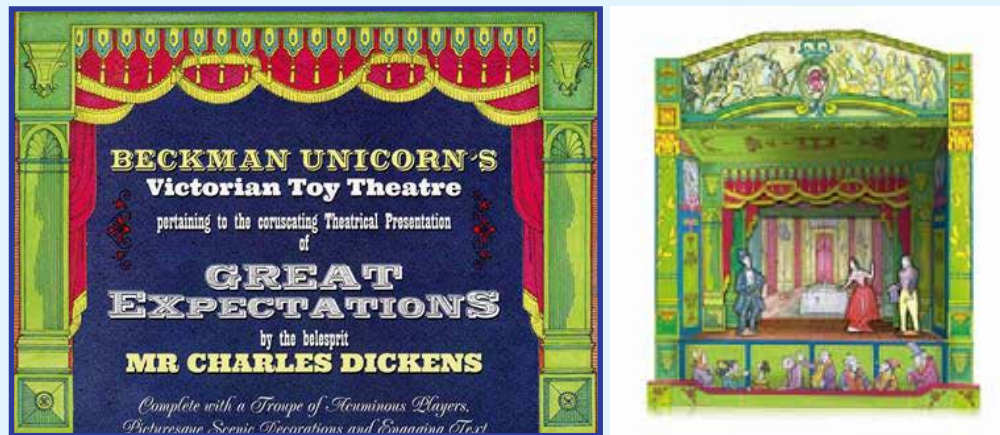


Everett also published several theatres in black and white. One is *Trial by Jury* based on the musical by Gilbert and Sullivan and the other is *Theatre Nouveau* featuring a dance from Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Gondoliers*. The latter also contains piano score and lyrics for the dance.

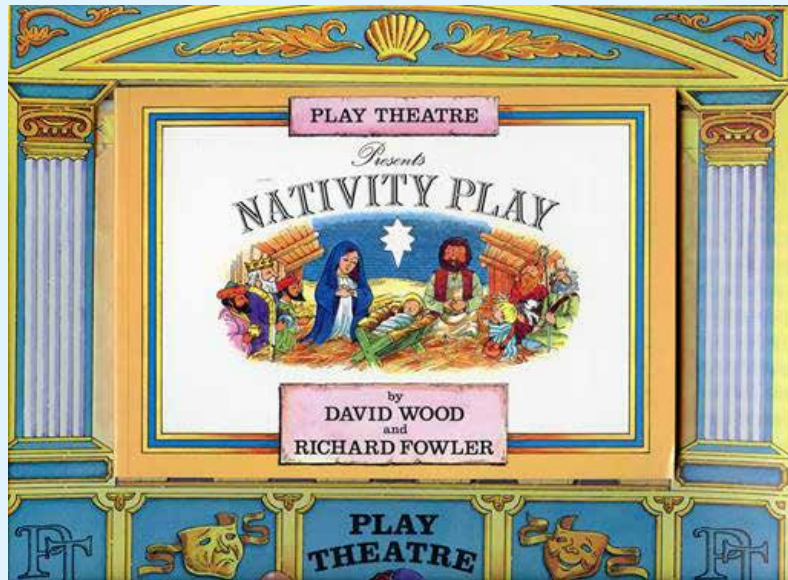




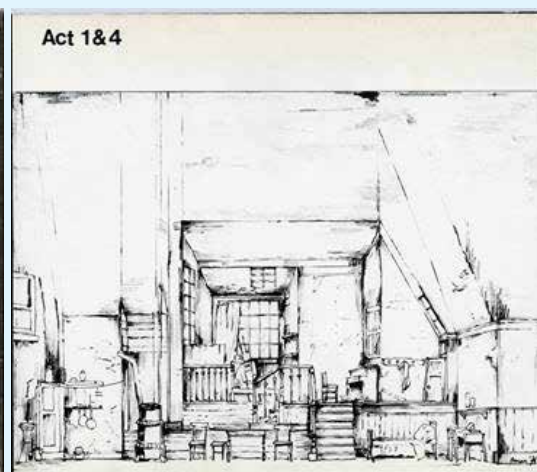
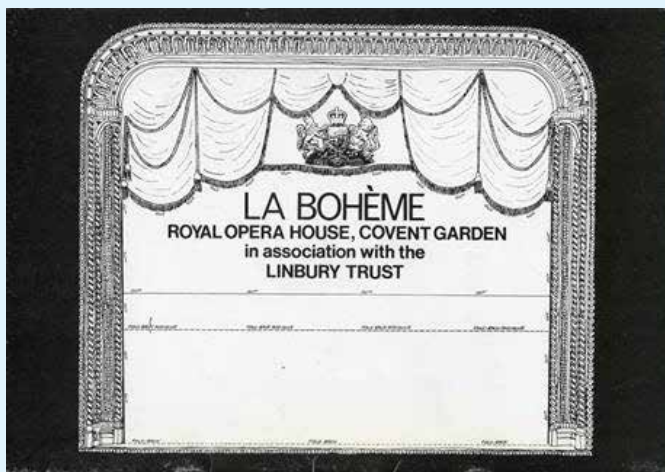
Here is a recent toy theatre for Charles Dicken's *Great Expectations*.



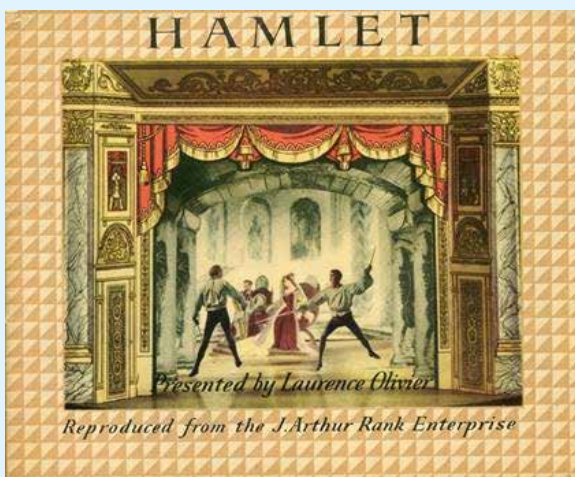
David Wood and Richard Fowler created a toy theatre version of the story of the nativity. In addition to the standup theatre there are sheets of characters and backdrops for the nativity play. The book that is part of this set has three parts. The first covers instructions, a list of theatrical words and expressions, how to conduct rehearsals and prepare for the performance, and how to make up your own plays. Part 2 is the story of the play, and Part 3 is the play itself.



Theatres also branched out into related subjects, such as operas and the new motion pictures. Puccini's *La Bohème* is a sparse black and white version of the scenery reflecting the poverty of the characters.



Hamlet is from the movie starring Laurence Olivier. While the characters are colored, the backdrops are very moody in black, white and grey.



While looking at this entry, I got to thinking about the transition from the theatre to the movies, and I suddenly realized that when I was young there were many so-called movie palaces that were as elaborate or even more so than the theatres, often with beautiful prosceniums and even an entire theme carried out to the front of the theatre. This led me to an interesting book called *When Movies Were Theater* by William Paul that studies how American films developed with the evolution of theatre architecture. If you have a chance to look at this book, do check out the illustration on page 9 showing the plan of the Duplex Theater in Detroit, the first to try to divide the theatre to show two different movies at the same time. I'm glad that the later duplex theatres were much simpler.

I am also glad that Santa Barbara has an ongoing example of a movie palace that was created to fit the Spanish feel of the city. The auditorium has Spanish house fronts on the side walls, and the sky above has twinkling stars so that the audience feels that they are sitting outdoors. The entryway to the theatre is also beautiful and in keeping with its surroundings – do try to see a movie here if you are ever in town. It is one of the many theatres in town used for the International Film Festival held in Santa Barbara each year. Pictures of this beautiful theater taken by Mike Hume can be seen online at www.historicaltheatrephotos.com/Theatre/Arlington-Santa-Barbara.aspx.

A CONSTRUCTED TOY THEATRE AND ITS STORAGE BOX

This is the only toy theatre I have that has been put together. The earlier owner created a box on which to stand the theatre and put the orchestra picture on the front of a drawer in the bottom. The drawer can hold the theater and keep it safe between productions and provides a stage during productions.



Once you have your theatre put together, it is time to get booklets with particular plays, scenes, and characters to stage in your theatre. The first decision is whether to buy “penny plain” (black and white versions) or “twopence coloured”. I have already shown several versions of black and white plays *Oliver Twist*, *Trial by Jury*, *The Gondoliers*, and *La Boheme*. But I must admit that I prefer the colored versions myself. Some samples of these are listed below. Many of these are children’s stories and fairy tales. Others are historical or just fun overly-dramatic adventure plays.

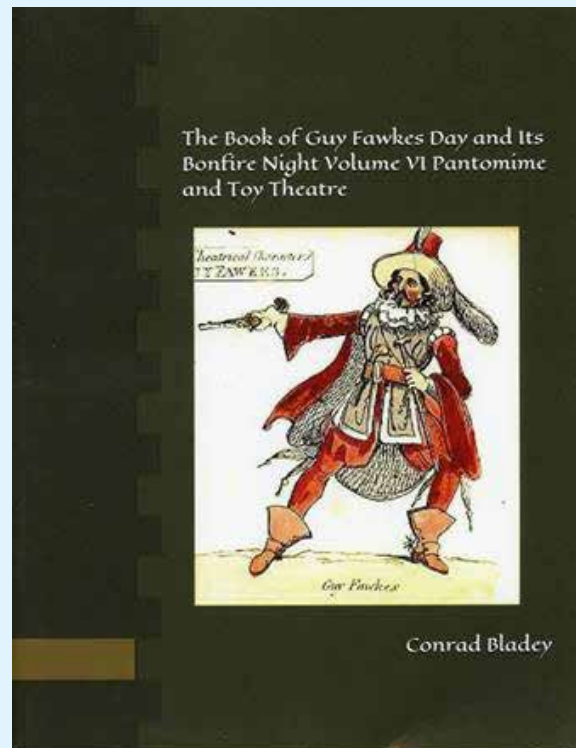
Children’s productions have always been popular and often showed up as Christmas or as fairy tale theatres. Some of the scripts in the Susan Quinlan Library are:

Aladdin
Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves
Babes in the Woods
Cinderella
Jack and the Beanstalk
Sleeping Beauty

Others are more dramatic or historical:

Blackbeard the Pirate
Corsican Brothers
Harlequinade
Richard the Third
St. George and the Dragon

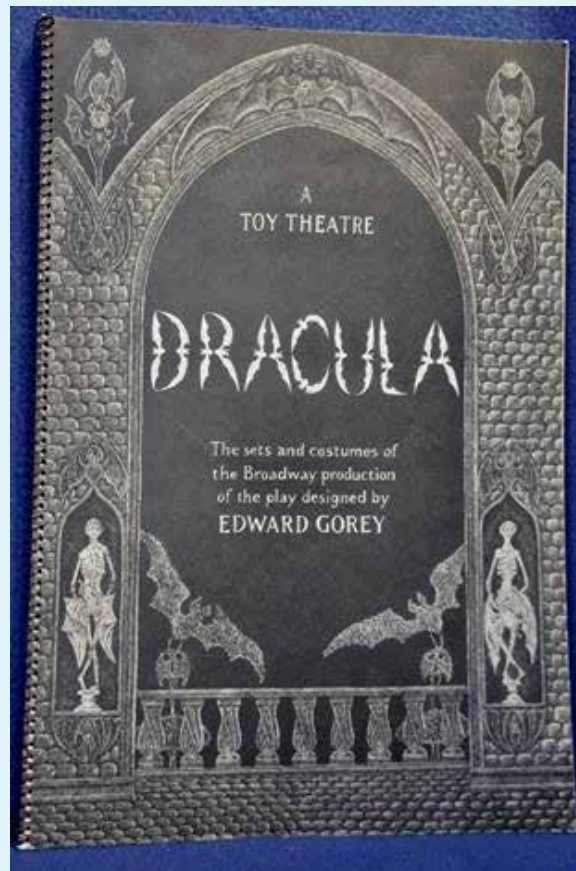
Guy Fawkes Day which celebrates the failure of a terrorist to blow up Parliament is a favorite in England, giving them the chance to have fireworks and explosions rather like the American Fourth of July. It has been the source of many plays and pantomimes. *The Book of Guy Fawkes Day and Its Bonfire Night, Volume VI* by Conrad Bladely contains scripts for a dozen historical pantomimes and toy theatre scripts on the topic. The first was published in 1793, and other versions are given in chronological order of their publication until 1866. It is possible to see the transformation of the terrorist Guy Fawkes into a clown in later publications.

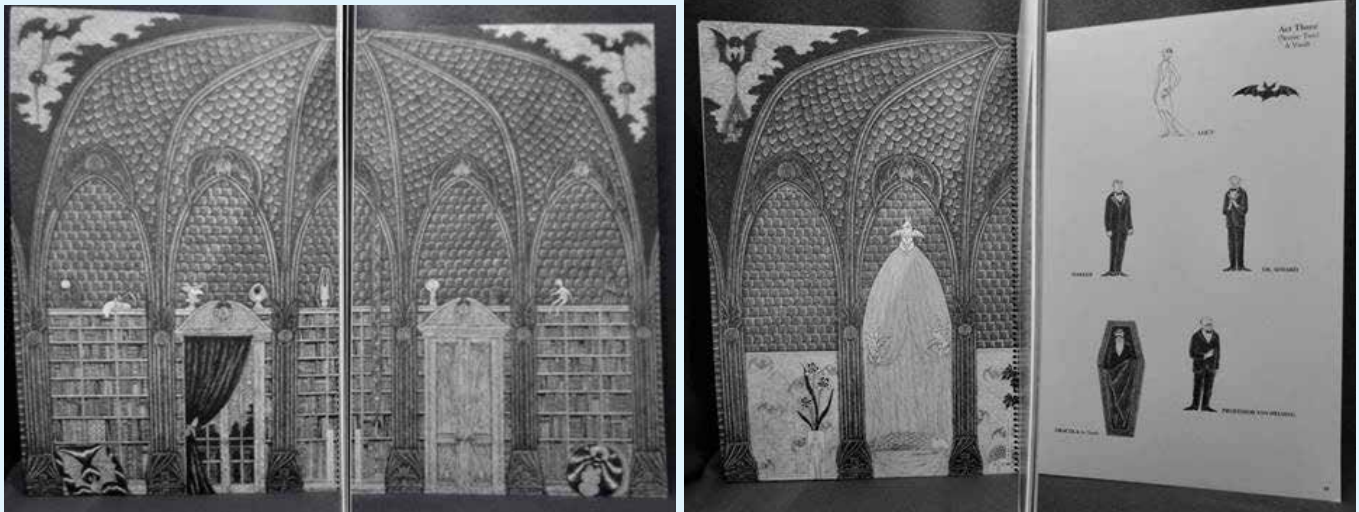


If you want to make copies of sets and characters, one source is from available CDs. The images can be downloaded onto your computer and can then be readjusted to the size you need.

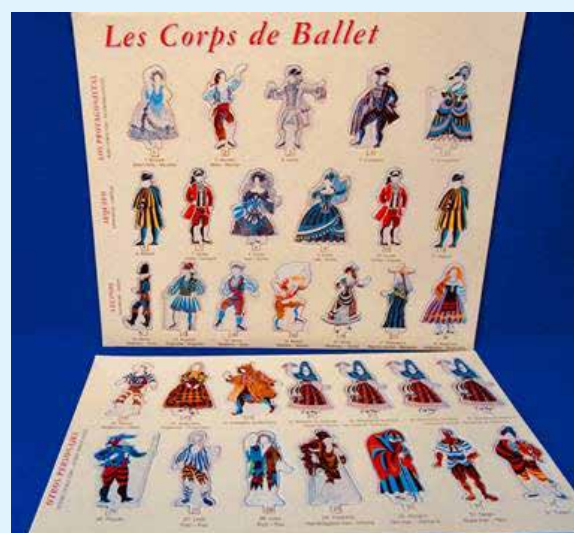


Two examples of toy theatres created by well-known artists are Edward Gorey's *Dracula* and Pablo Picasso's *Three Cornered Hat*. One illustrates the use of black and white illustrations to great advantage, while the other is very colorful.

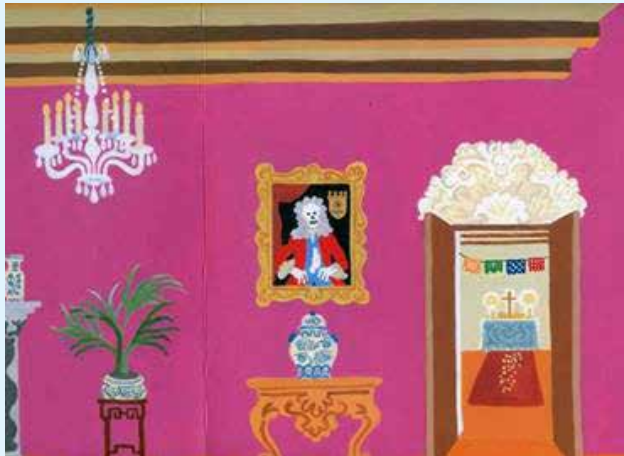
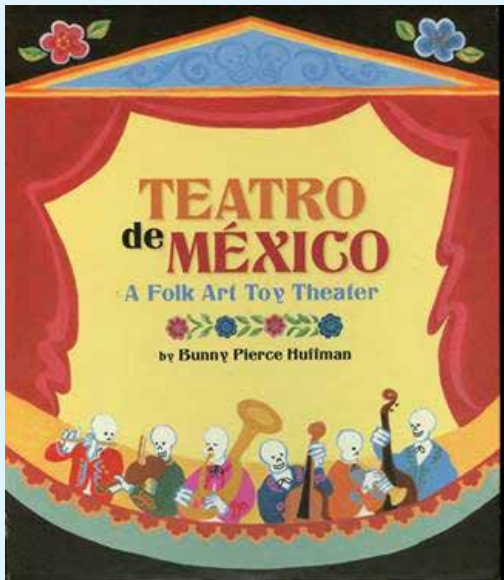




Picasso's theatre for the production of DeFalla's *Three Cornered Hat* opera.



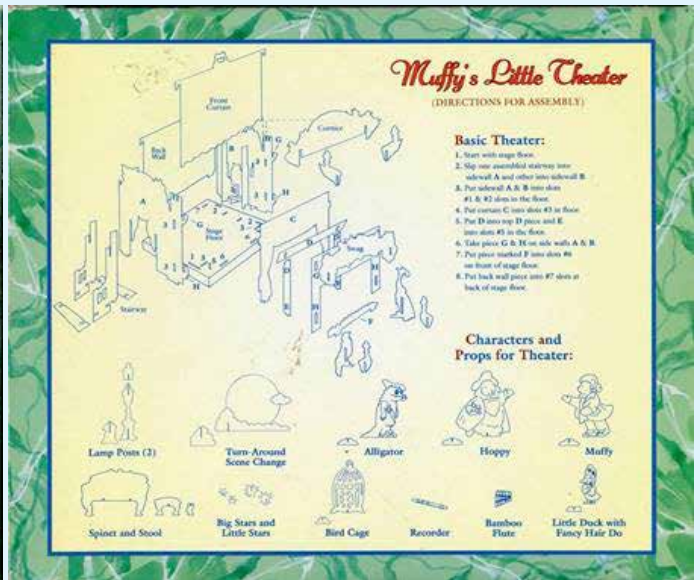
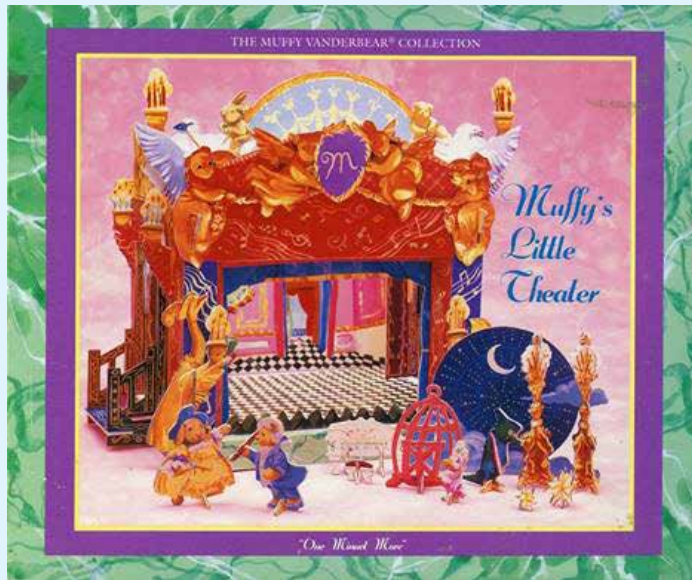
A fun and colorful toy theatre was created by Bunny Huffman with the theme of the Day of the Dead.



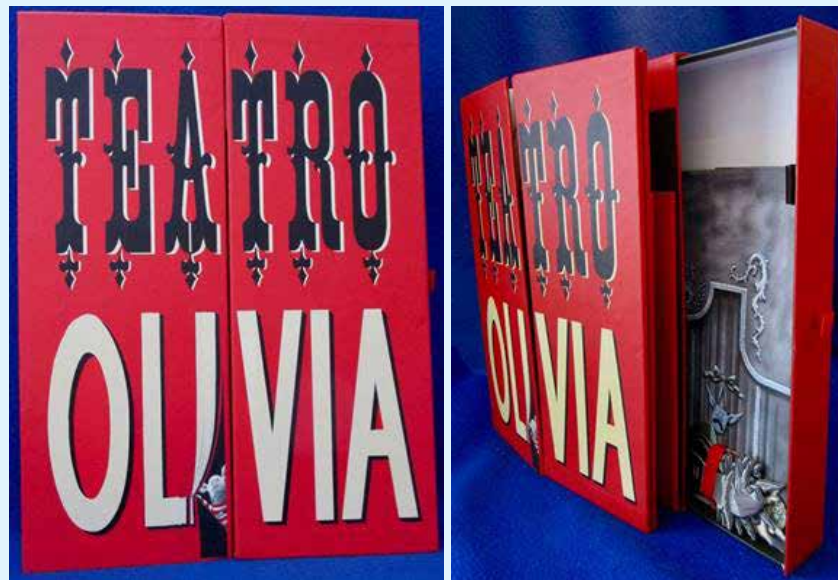
Viola Seddon and Jean Mahoney created theatres for three famous ballets. The boxes open up to reveal the theatre with the stage. Sets and characters can be kept of a drawer that can be pulled out from the side of the box. The ballets are *Nutcracker Ballet*, *Sleeping Beauty Ballet*, and *Swan Lake Ballet*.



Teddy bears also have their own version of a toy theatre, thanks to North American Bear Company's Muffy. This set is based on the One Minuet More collection.



Another animal character was Olivia the Pig.



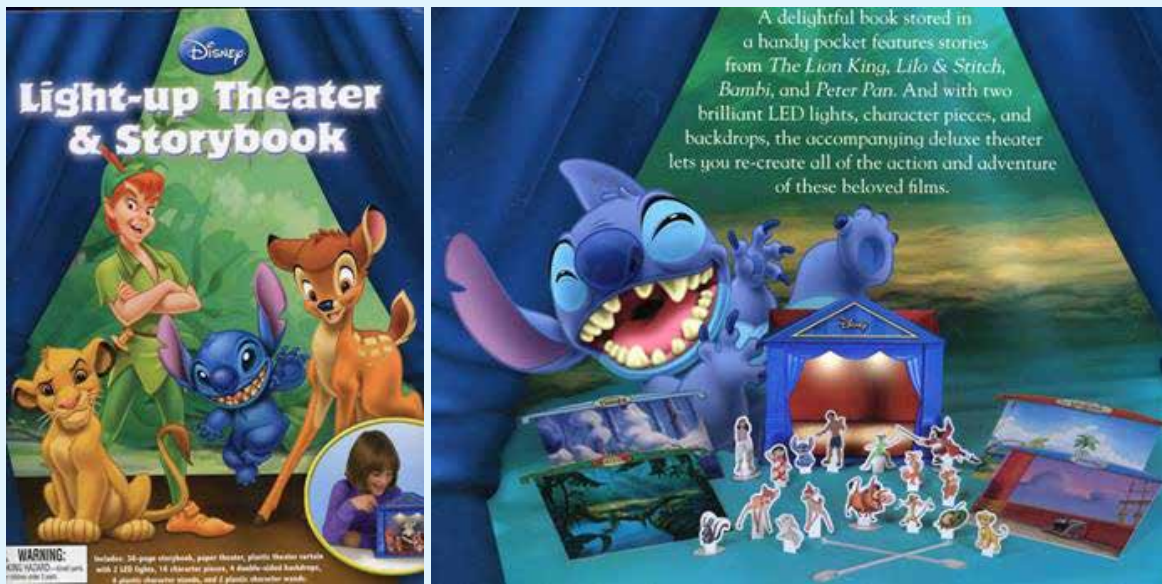
Many of the more recent kits are based on familiar fairy tales. The Peck Aubry Company, known for their paper dolls, put out a toy theatre based on their dolls.



This Children's Theatre published by Peeleman-McLoughlin Enterprises is also charming and decorative.



Disney has also done a number of theatre kits for their characters. In the *Light-up Theater*, the theatre has been reduced to a very simple plastic and cardboard structure.

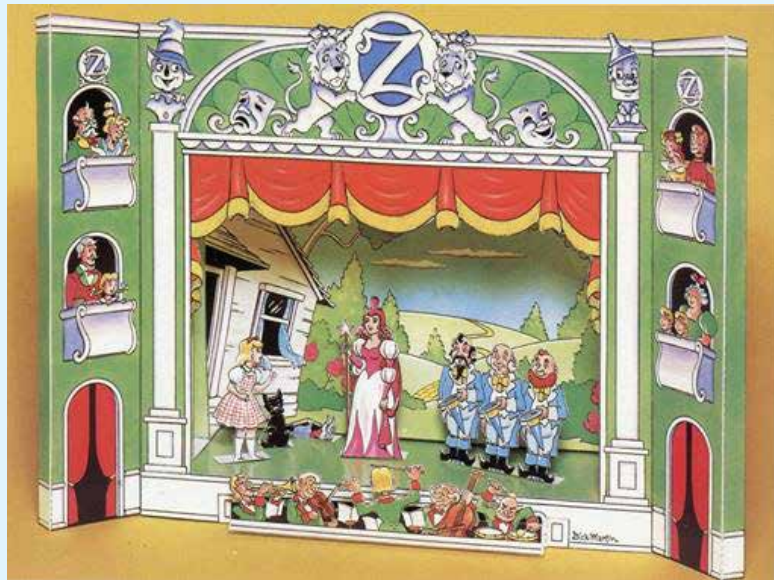
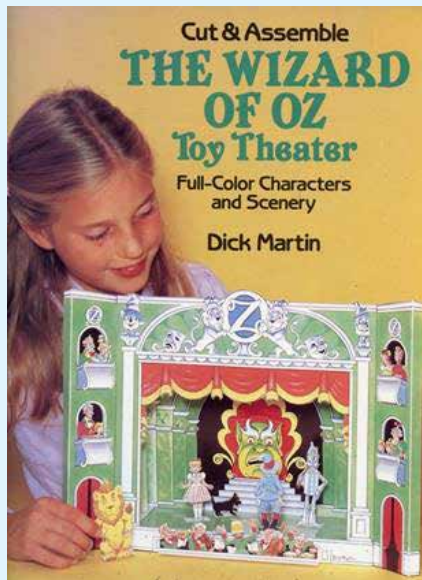


A plastic stage does not need to be boring. A fun departure from the printed theatre is this plastic toy reproduction of the old showboats that used to ply the Mississippi. The owner could buy four different play sets to perform on this stage. They were *Heidi*, *Cinderella*, *Wizard of Oz*, and *Pinocchio*. Here the theatre has been set up for a scene from *Heidi*.

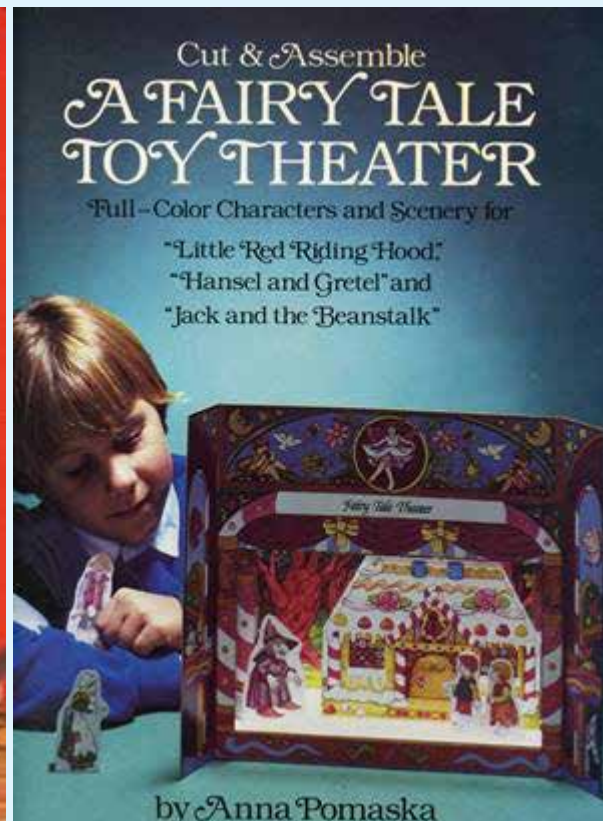
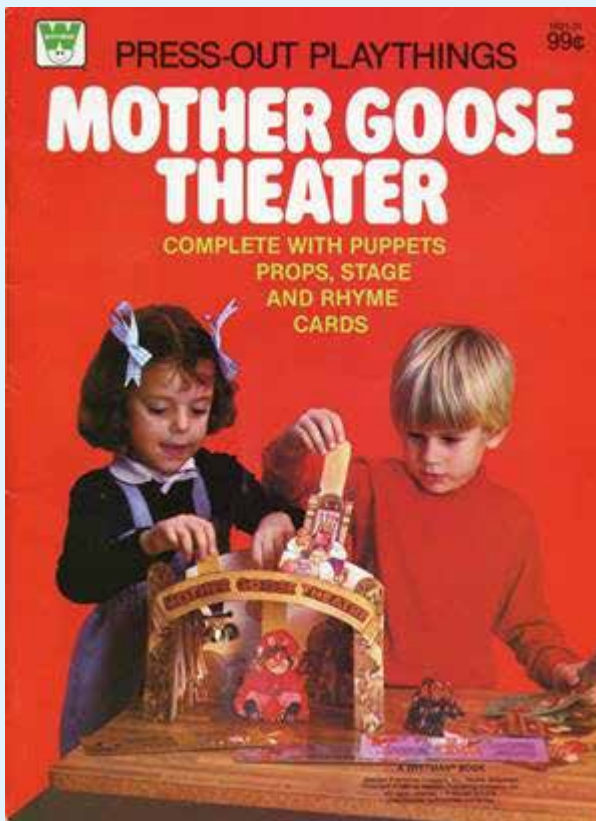


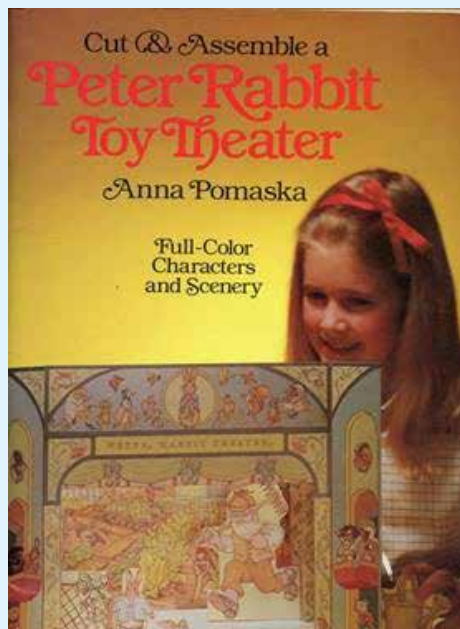
CUT AND ASSEMBLE BOOKS

A number of books have been published that the reader can cut apart and construct their own stand-alone toy theatre. Dick Martin created the Wizard of Oz Toy Theater based on the original illustrations by William Wallace Denslow.

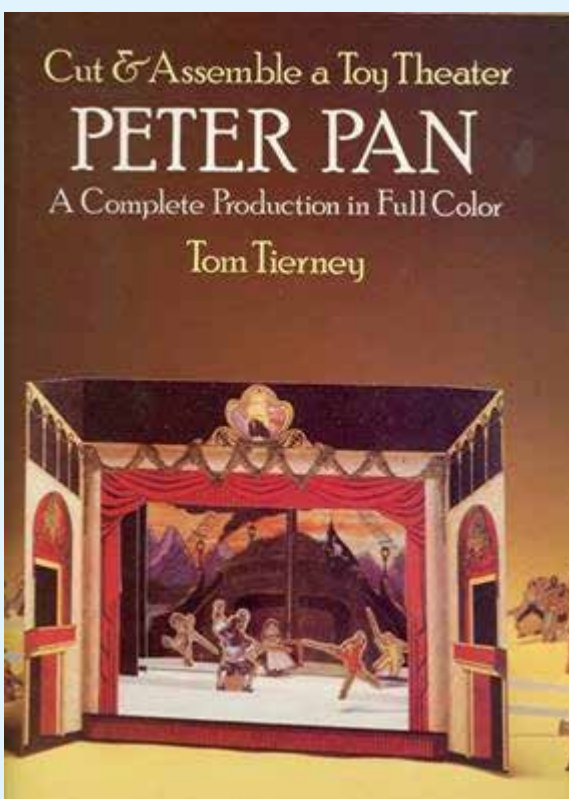
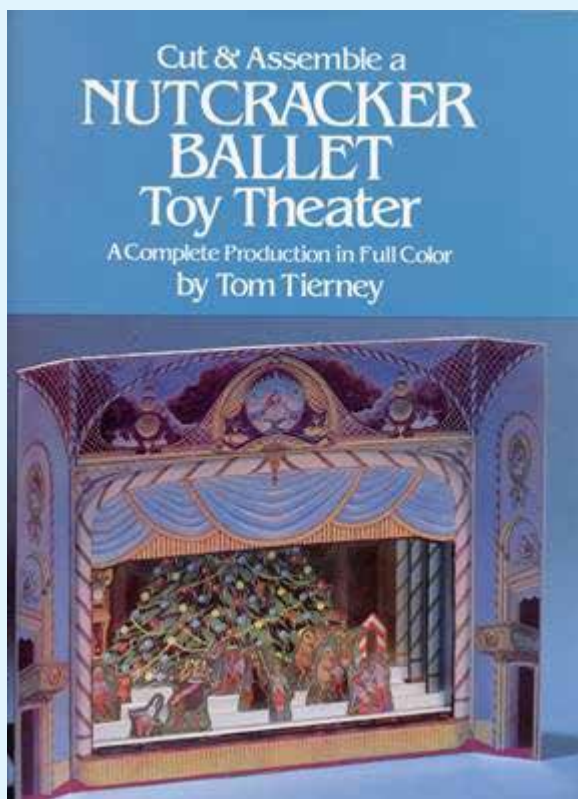


The *Mother Goose Theater* teaches children a number of Mother Goose rhymes. Anna Pomaska created *A Fairy Tale Toy Theater* and a *Peter Rabbit Toy Theatre*.

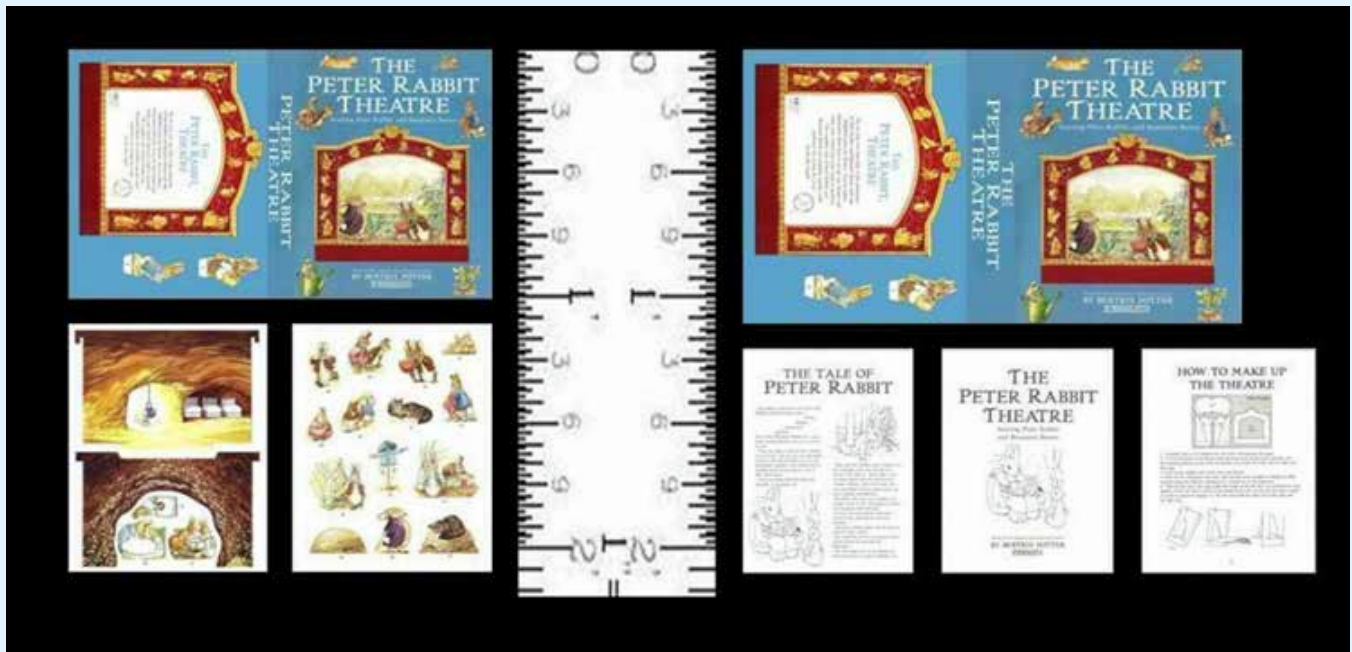




Tom Tierney made two different toy theatres, one from the story of Peter Pan and the other from the ballet of the Nutcracker.

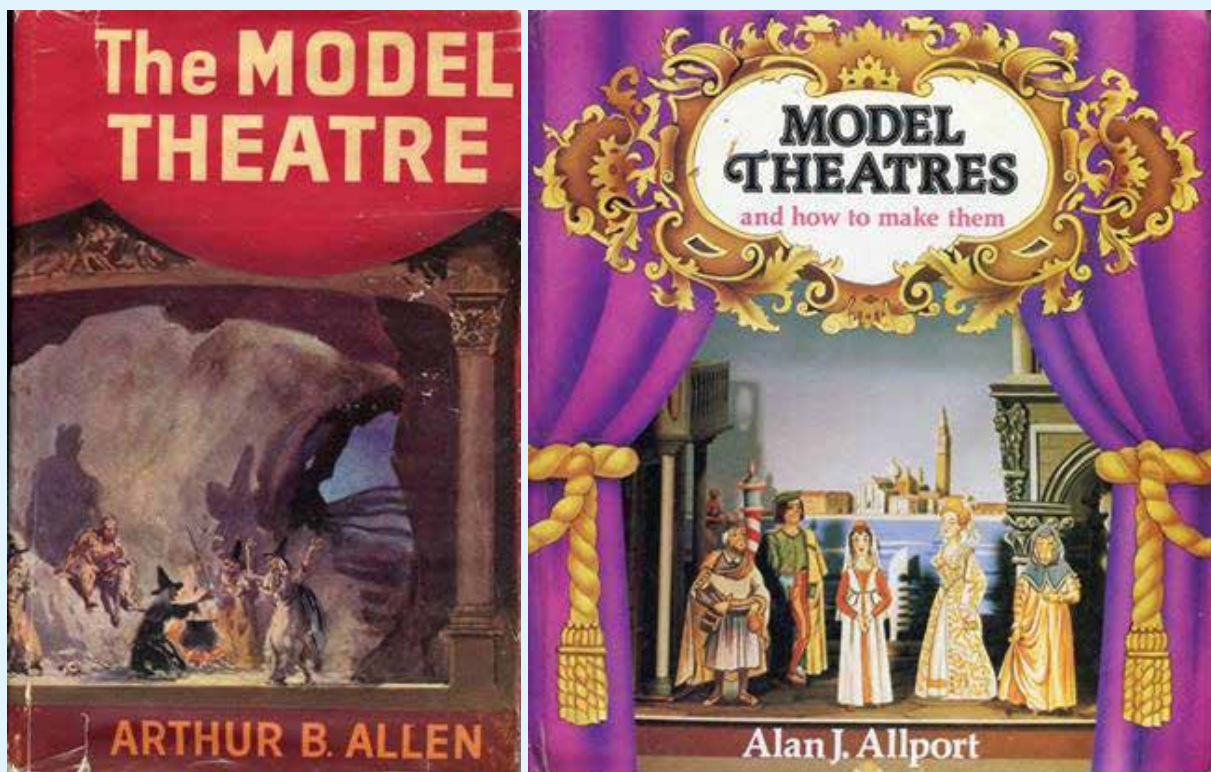


Not all toy theatres are large. Here is the latest addition to my miniature book collection. The blue cover on the right is the cover of the folder that holds all of these items, while the cover on the left is used for the book that has the story and the directions. The character and scenery sheets are laid into the folder.



BOOKS ON HOW TO MAKE YOUR OWN TOY THEATRES

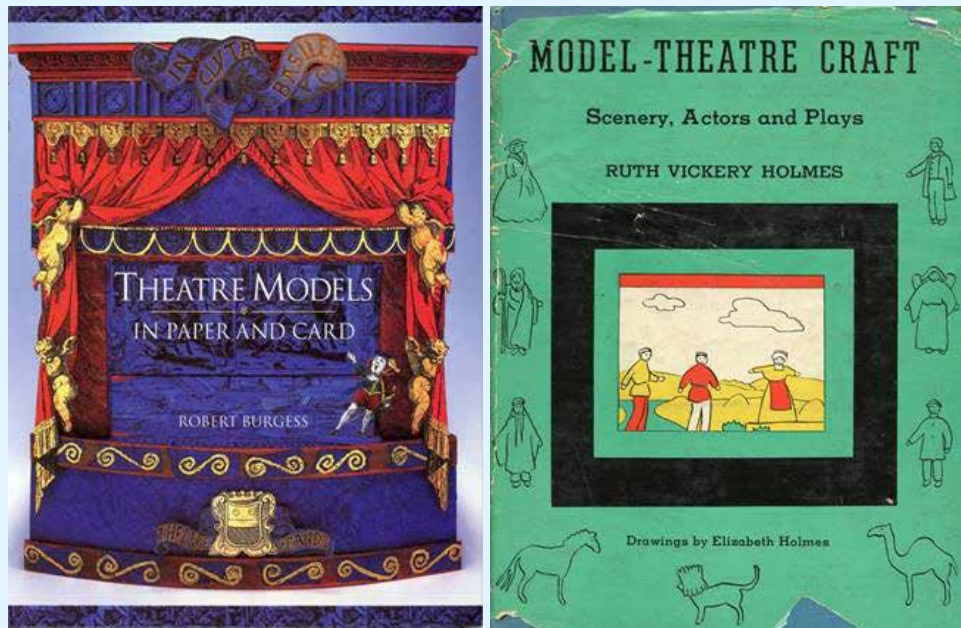
A number of books explain how to make toy theatres from scratch.



Allen, Arthur B. *The Model Theatre*. Part of this book tells how to build a toy theatre and create the appropriate characters. Shadow shows, that are very similar, are also covered. The remainder of the book covers puppet theaters, glove puppets, and marionettes. The appendix contains the text of *Punch and Judy*.

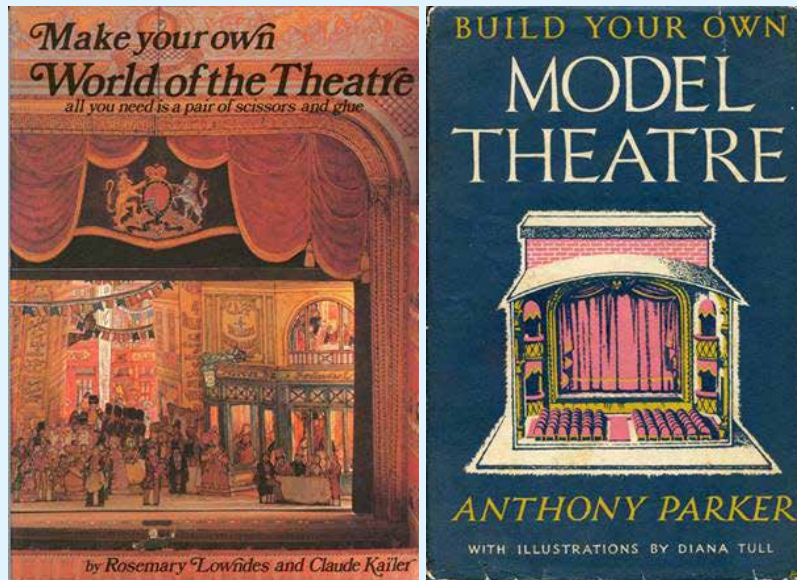
Allport, Alan. *Model Theatres and How to Make Them*. Instructions are given for building toy theatres and

putting on productions in them. Chapters cover materials needed, the stage, backstage, orchestra, scenery, setting a play, presenting a play, and producing a musical. The reader will be able to make theatres for a play, a musical, a circus, a pop star concert, and a ballet. Black and white versions of characters and scenery for *The Merchant of Venice*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Sleeping Beauty* are included.



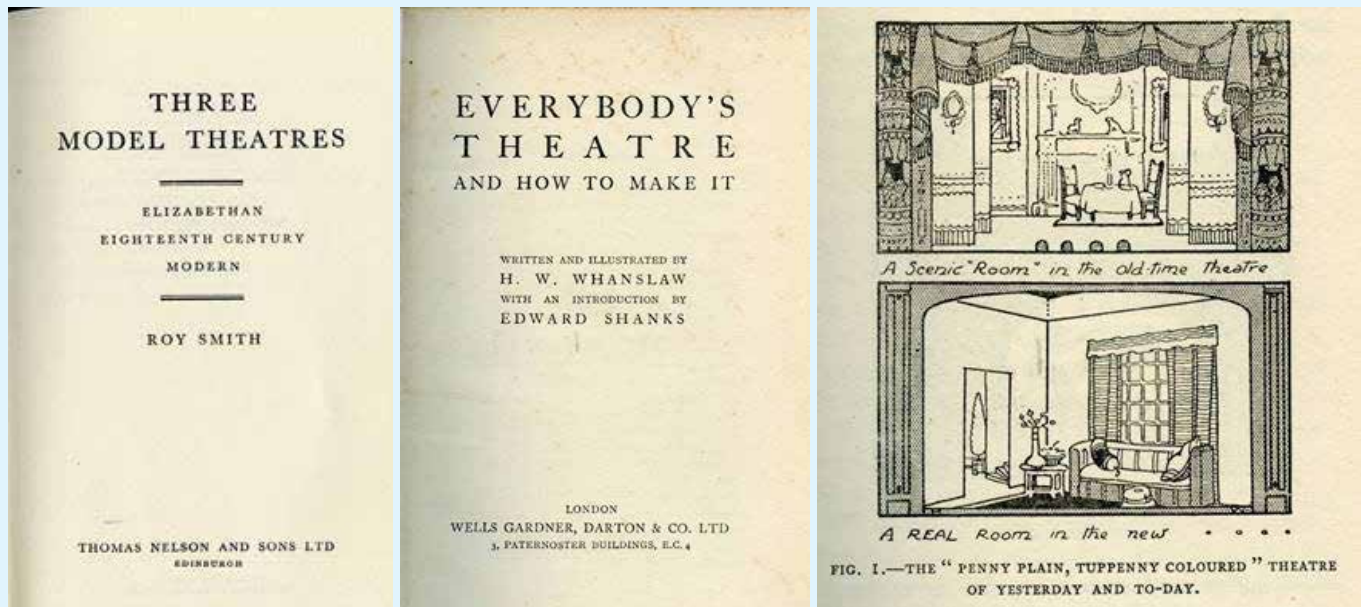
Burgess, Robert. *Theatre Models in Paper and Card*. The author has attempted to update and modernize the design of toy theatres while still staying true to the original. The purpose is to inspire imaginative possibilities in these designs. There are 10 projects, each requiring simple craft techniques and skills that are covered in Chapter six. The projects are a theatre house, three-dimensional theatre picture, winter wonderland, Punch and Judy book, Victorian Theatre Royale, Bali shadow theatre, and Theatre Grande. There is a chapter presenting a brief history of toy theatres, peepshows and puppetry.

Holmes, Ruth Vickery. *Model-Theatre Craft: Scenery, Actors and Plays*. This book gives instructions for creating a model theatre out of cardboard with some wooden parts. The characters are made from pipe cleaners and are dressed in crepe paper. There are three plays and a Christmas pageant included, each with directions for making the specific characters for that particular play. While this is aimed at being used by children, it can also be useful to dramatic writers and students to help them visualize character movements on the stage.



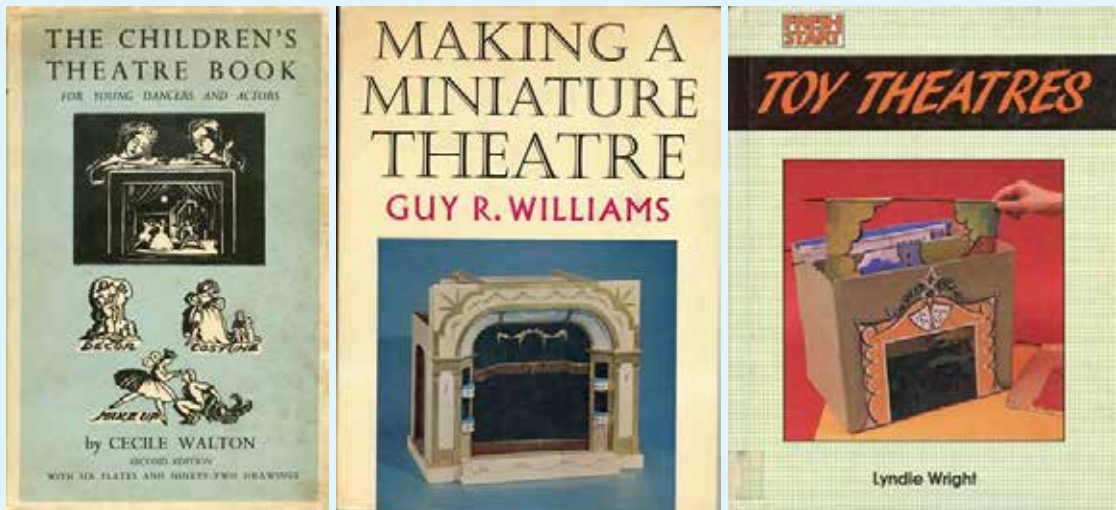
Lowndes, Rosemary and Claude Kailer. *Make Your Own World of the Theatre*. The pages of the book can be removed to create a three-dimensional toy theatre with two full productions and eight different sets. The first production is the opera *La Boheme*, and the second is the ballet *The Sleeping Beauty*. The story of each production is included, but since they are mostly musical, there is no set script.

Parker, Anthony and Diana Tull. *Build Your Own Model Theatre*. The theatre is not quite to the proper scale to be called a toy theatre, but many of the techniques and ideas can be used for both. It contains information about the “grid” and the “flies”, permanent fittings, a curtain that opens and closes, and lighting equipment suitable for the period. You can even add the auditorium area, and there is information on scenery and properties.



Smith, Roy. *Three Model Theatres*. This book provides simple step-by-step instructions for building three wooden model theatres of different centuries: an Elizabethan theatre, an 18th century theatre, and a modern theatre. There is also a very short history of the development of the theatre.

Whanslaw, H. W. *Everybody's Theatre and How to Make it*. Whanslaw's book describes how to make a toy theatre, but he wants to be sure that the maker realizes that times have changed and that theatres are now more modern. After all, his book was published in 1931 and much had changed since the late 1800s. Gone were the wonderful curtains, pediments, and surrounding architecture in favor of modern, streamlined stage surrounds, and the rooms could now be set at an angle with visible doors and modern furniture.



Walton Cecile. *The Children's Theatre Book for Young Dancers and Actors*. This book was written to help young boys and girls who might want to be dancers or actors to see images of themselves. It is important to know what line your body makes when moving, and whether the costume enhances this line. A good way to be aware of this is to draw figures of actors or dancers, and to create a model theatre on which to place these figures. Directions are given for constructing two different theaters – a wooden model that is much sturdier and a cardboard model that must be smaller because it is more fragile. Scenery, costuming and lighting are also discussed.

Williams, Guy R. *Making a Miniature Theatre*. Clear and detailed instructions are given for the construction of a miniature theatre. The first chapter gives a brief overview of the history of theatres. The other chapters explain how to make the theatre, the stage and its surrounds, and curtains and draperies. There is also information on how to build a three-dimensional scene with flat planes, how to make a scene more exciting with more complex forms, how to make a cyclorama (a revolving stage), and how to fit miniature lights into the stage. The last chapter covers gauzes and other special effects.

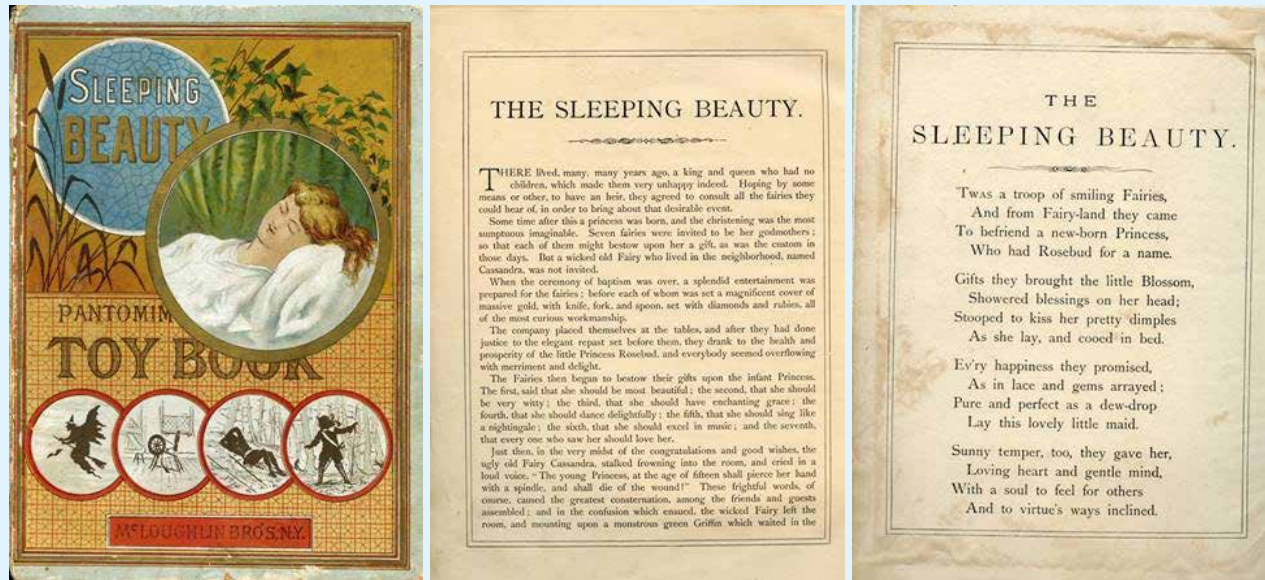
Wright, Lyndie. *Toy Theatres*. This book provides a fun and inexpensive approach to making toy theatres. The basic materials used are paper, card, cardboard boxes and paints. It is hoped that once the techniques are learned, the reader will try to develop new characters and theatres of their own design. The kinds of theatres covered are a paper nativity crib, peepshow, spinning disc booth, tinsel portraits, show box booth, paper cone figures, cardboard box toy theatre, toy theatre scenery, figures, and shadow theatre. There is a brief history of toy theatres at the end of the book.

BOOKS UTILIZING THE TOY THEATRE FORMAT

The following books differ from the cut and assemble books in that the theatre remains in the book and can be put away on a shelf after being played with.

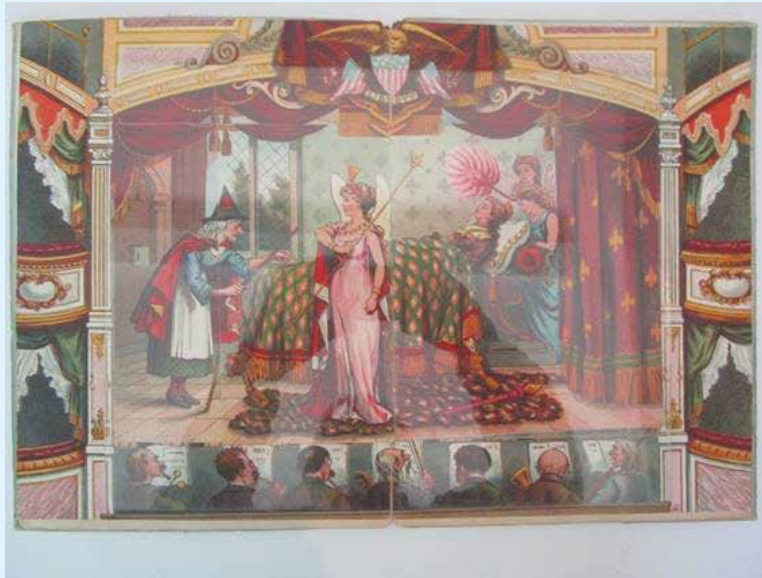
This early *Sleeping Beauty Pantomime Toy Book* by McLoughlin is quite elaborate. To begin with, there are

two versions of the story, one in prose and the other a poem.



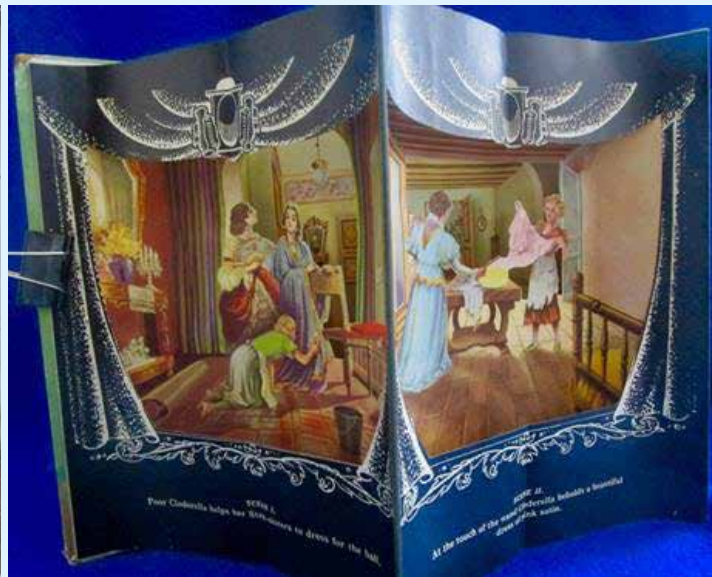
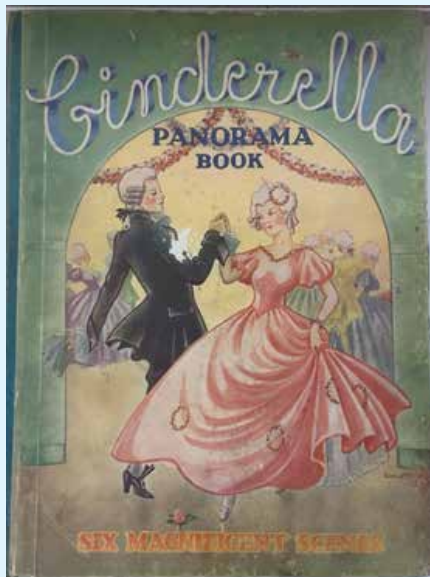
In the center of the book are the illustrations that appear in a smaller booklet that fits inside the theatre stage. There are three parts of the story that have pages of different sizes that illustrate particular parts of the action. The page on the left-hand side is a full-sized page. The pages on the right-hand side are of different widths, the first being $\frac{1}{4}$ and the second $\frac{1}{2}$ sizes. As each smaller page is turned, it changes the overall scene. The first, which is shown below, is when Sleeping Beauty finds the spinning wheel and pricks her finger. The other two scenes are of the courtiers sleeping and the Prince finding Sleeping Beauty and marrying her.

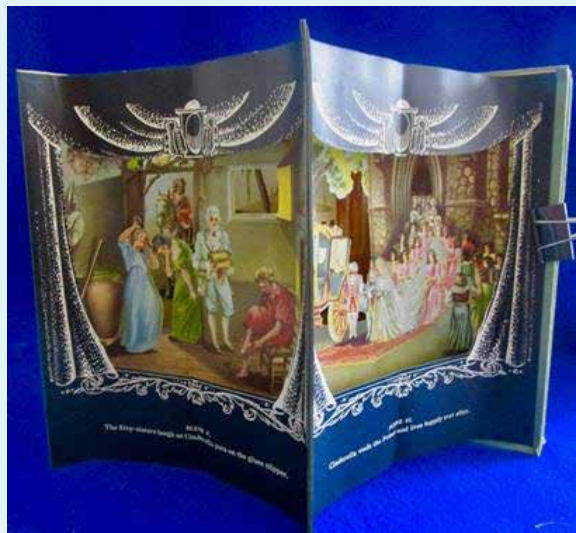
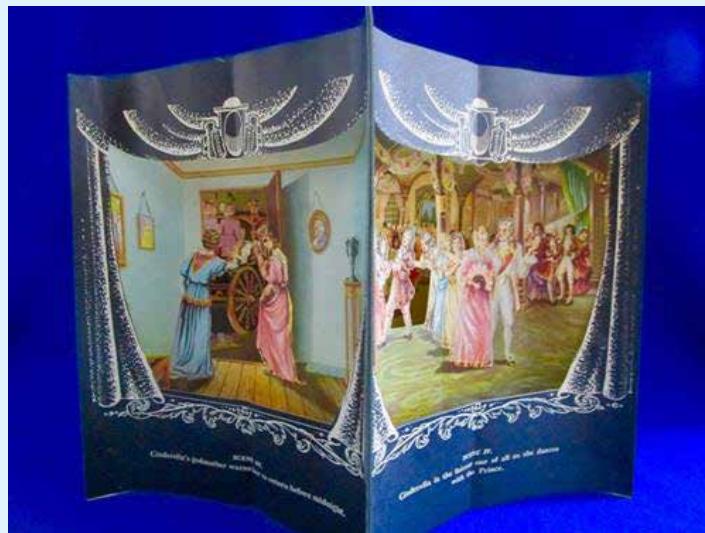




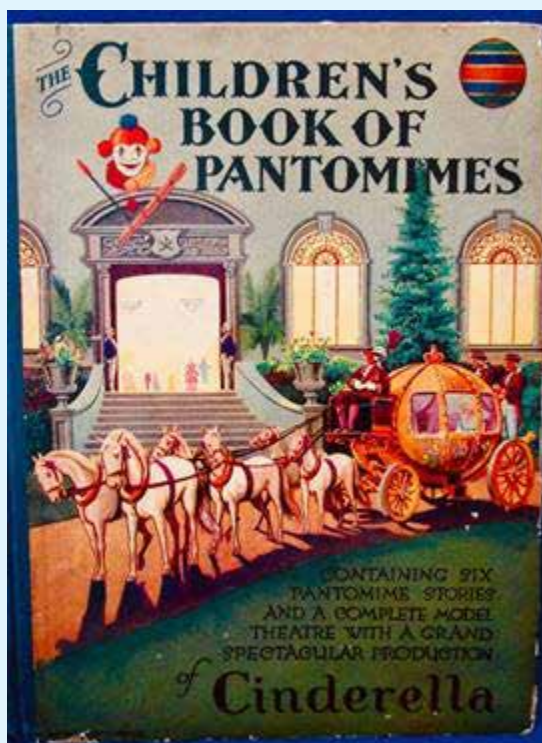
Cinderella is always a popular story and was always a favorite play or pantomime in the toy theatre. This popularity carried over into versions of the story that were published as books with toy theatre formats.

An early version is this *Cinderella Panorama Book*. It has six pop-up scenes from the story, each within a stage setting with curtains and proscenium.





The *Children's Book of Pantomimes* actually has a picture of two children playing with the theatre. The back cover contained the stage setting, and characters were included. One of the scenes was for the ballroom shown here with Cinderella and the Prince inserted.

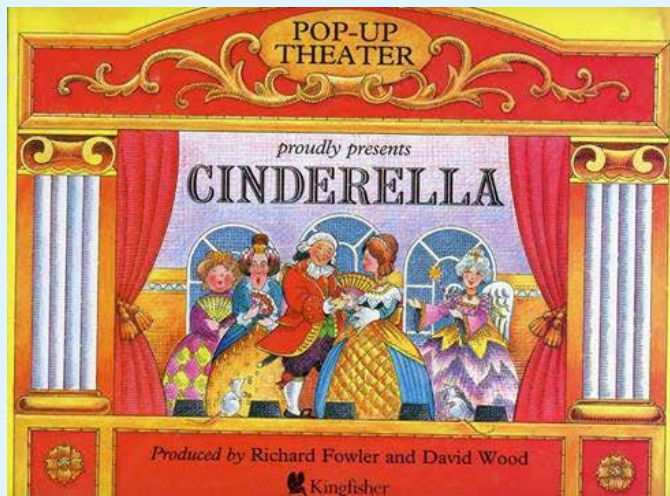




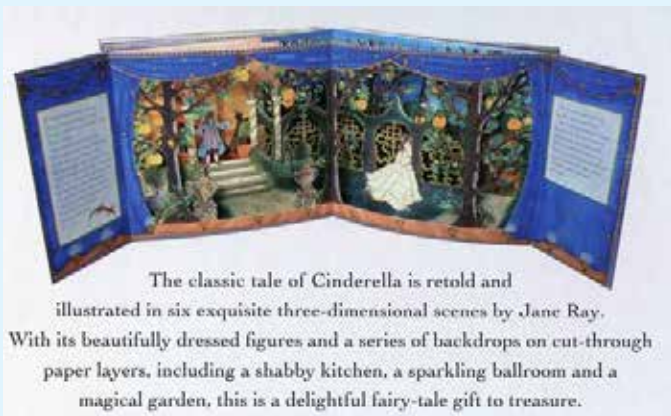
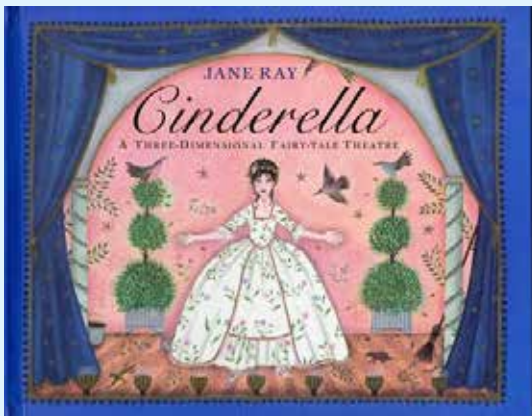
This *Cinderella Puppet Show* is a Little Golden Book version by Disney with the front of the book showing the proscenium and the audience. The characters are attached to paper tabs and can be inserted from the bottom of the page into the scene. There are five scenes. Shown here is the ballroom scene first without the characters and then with the characters inserted. The tabs can be seen at the bottom of the book.



A more recent version, *Pop-up Theater Proudly Presents Cinderella* by Richard Fowler has a pop-up stage in the middle of the book.



Jane Ray illustrated *Cinderella: A Three-Dimensional Fairy Tale Theatre*.

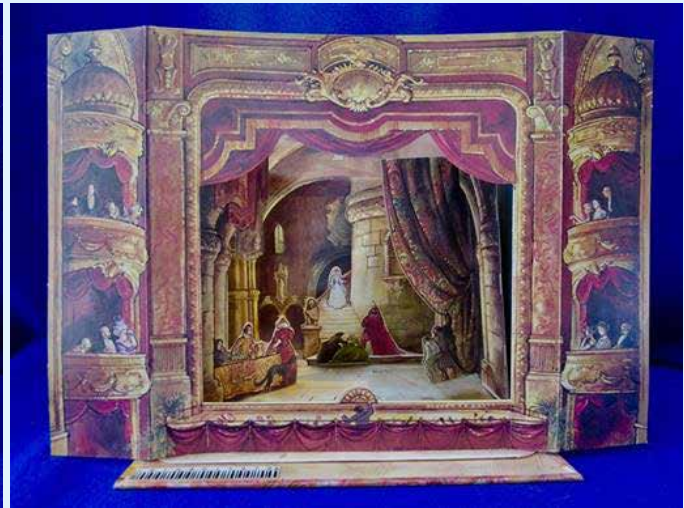
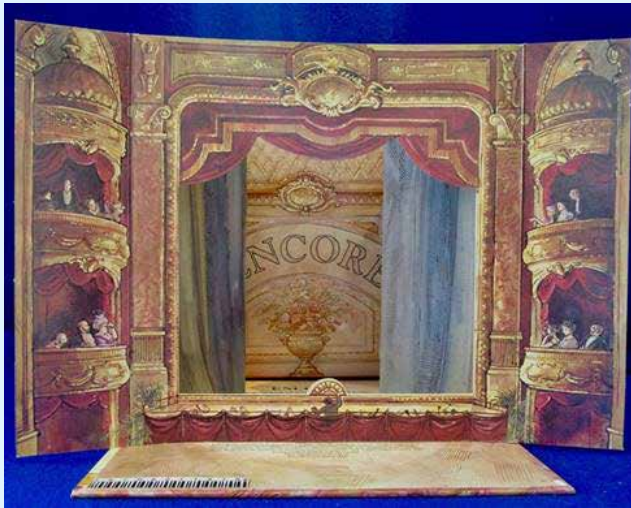


Ray also did a similar version of *Snow White*.

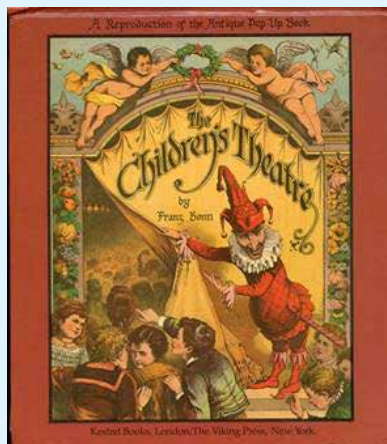


Antony Maitland's book *Antony Maitland's Encore a Pop-up Book of Scenes from the Theatre*, reflects the extravagant prosceniums and side panels of the early theatres. It contains four different generic scenes. The first is what a great drama or opera might be like, the second is a classical ballet, the third is for a musical comedy set in a train station, and the fourth is a simple landscape of just sky and what could be grass or

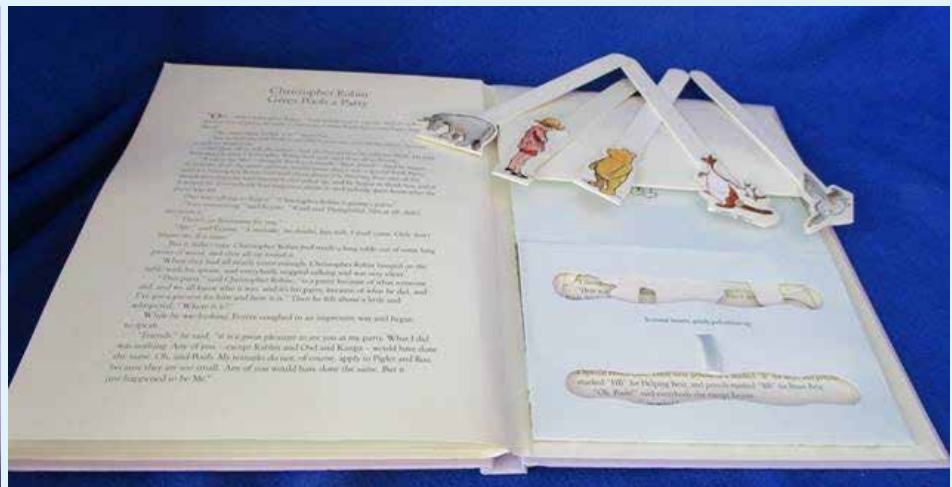
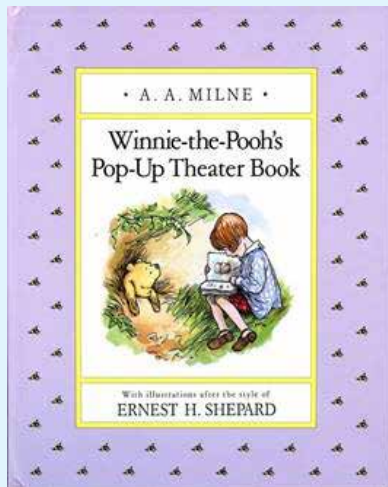
water. This last setting can be used by the reader to create their own story. Instructions on how to do this are on one of the theatre's side panels.



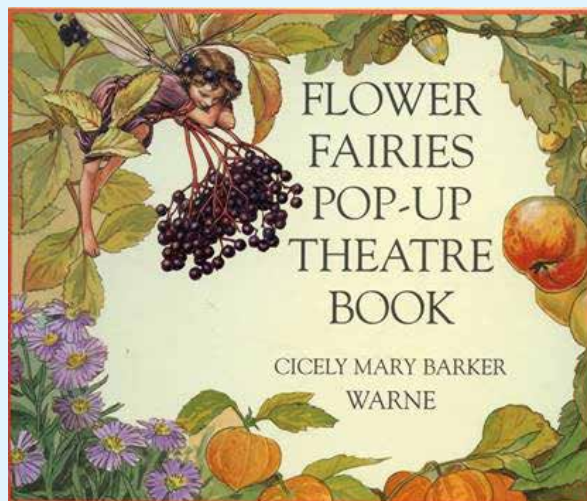
Franz Bonn published the original edition of *The Children's Theatre* in 1878 in Germany. This is an English language version published in 1978. The children of the family are shown in four pop-up stage scenes. They portray Red Riding Hood, Hansel and Gretel, and the Nativity. The fourth scene shows them on Christmas Eve partying with their family. And each scene shows a different group in the orchestra position.

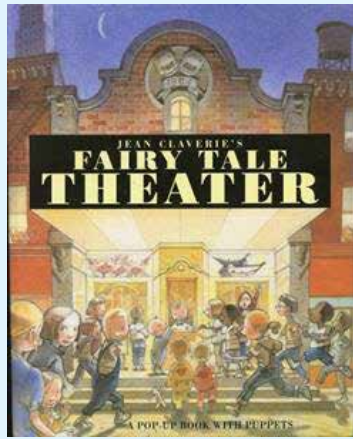


Teddy bears are represented once again in Milne's *Winnie-the-Pooh's Pop-Up Theater Book*. By pulling the small ribbon seen here just above the first cutout at the bottom of the right-hand page, the theatre section rises from the page and can be played with. The five characters are shown that can be used in the stages.

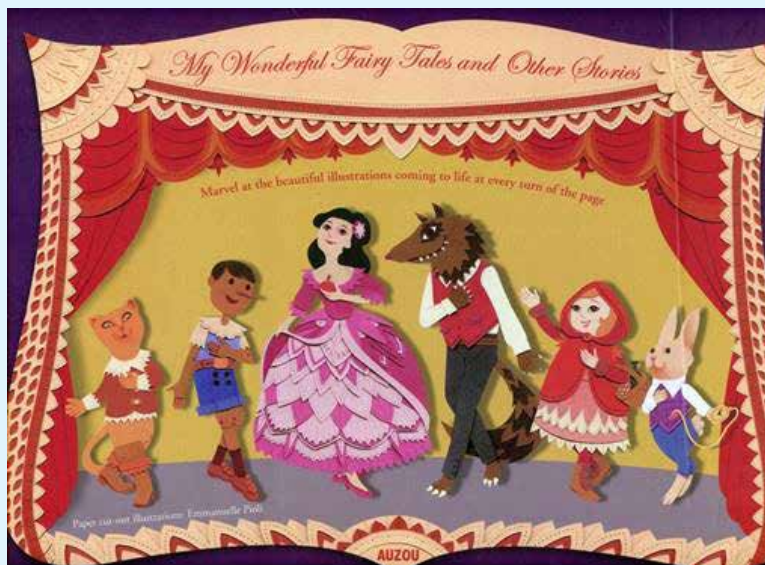


Some similar style books are Cicely Mary Barker's *Flower Fairies Pop-up Theatre Book* and Jean Claverie's *Fairy Tale Theater: a Pop-up Book with Puppets*.

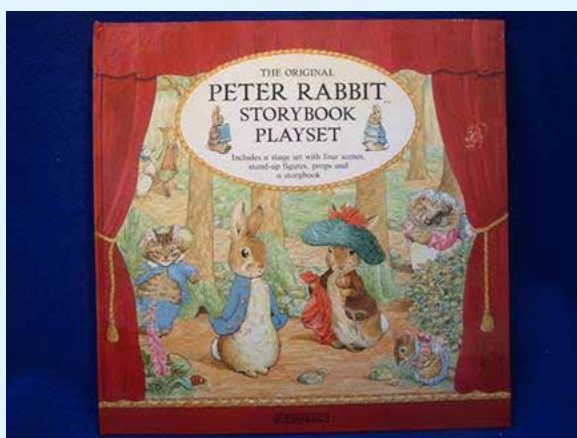


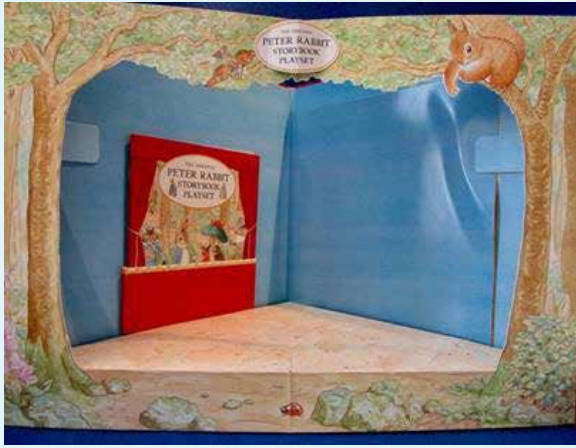


My Wonderful Fairy Tales and Other Stories has eight stories, each with its own pop-up scene made with beautiful die-cuts. The stories are Pinocchio, Hansel and Gretel, Puss in Boots, Snow White, Beauty and the Beast, Cinderella, Little Red Riding Hood, and Alice in Wonderland.

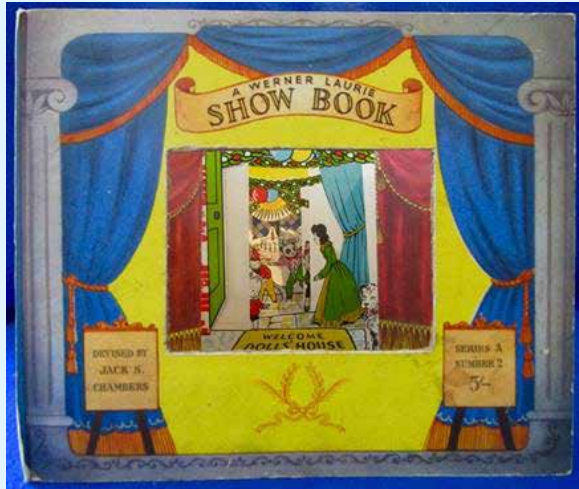
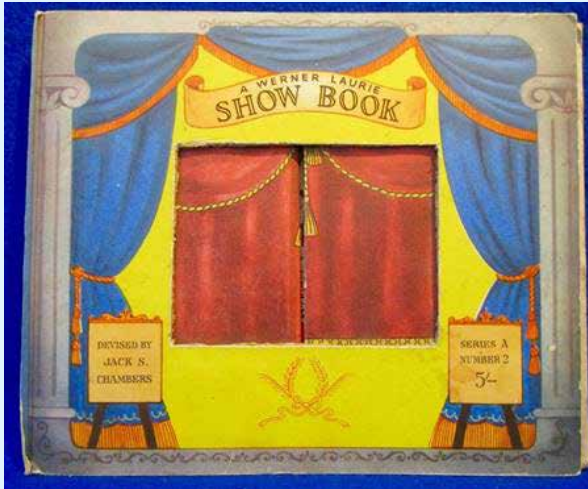


Beatrix Potter's stories are also very popular among children and have been made into a variety of toy and movable books. Here is a *Peter Rabbit Storybook Playset*.





Enid Blyton was one of the most prolific children's authors. In *Mary Mouse*, drawn by Olive Openshaw and published as a Werner Laurie Show Book (Series A, Number 2), her dollhouse family and their faithful Mary Mouse are shown in a combination toy theatre and peep show formats. These two forms were often combined.



Both musical productions and movies have continued to be popular in toy theatre book form. This version of E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Nutcracker Ballet* is actually a carousel-style pop-up book, but the illustrations for each scene include side curtains to give the effect that this is being presented on a theatre stage.



A more recent opera is Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *Magic Flute*, illustrated by Michael Sowa. The illustrations are beautiful and haunting. A pocket in the book holds the proscenium and the many characters that can be held in front of the illustrations in the book that serve as backdrops.



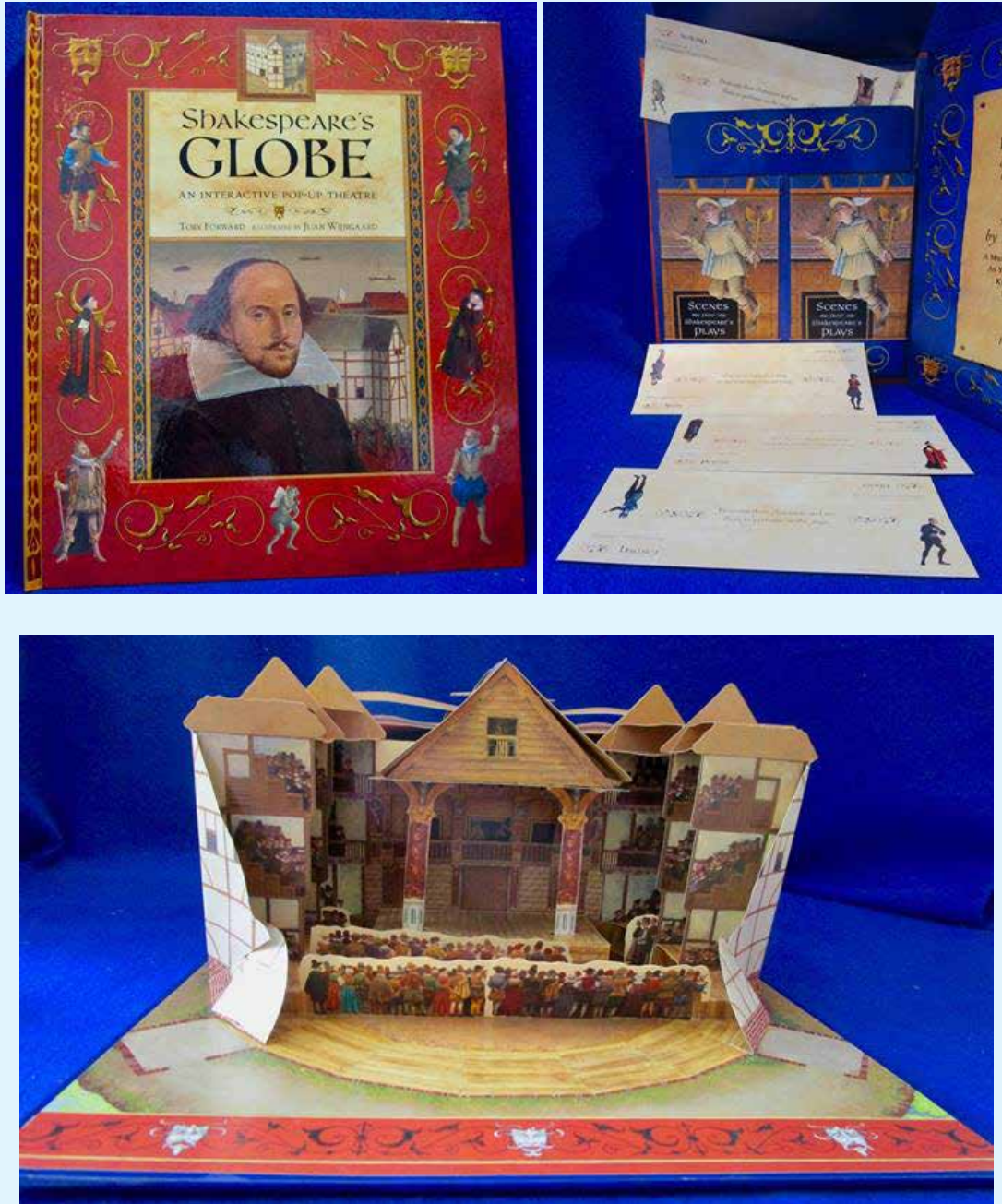
Robyn Johnson did a series of wonderful books on a dollhouse family that lived in an enchanted dollhouse. These books included the *Enchanted Dolls' House Theatre*, with the scenes for four different plays – *Romeo and Juliet*, *Swan Lake*, *The Pirates of Penzance*, and *My Fair Lady*.



In the movie arena there are more done by Disney.

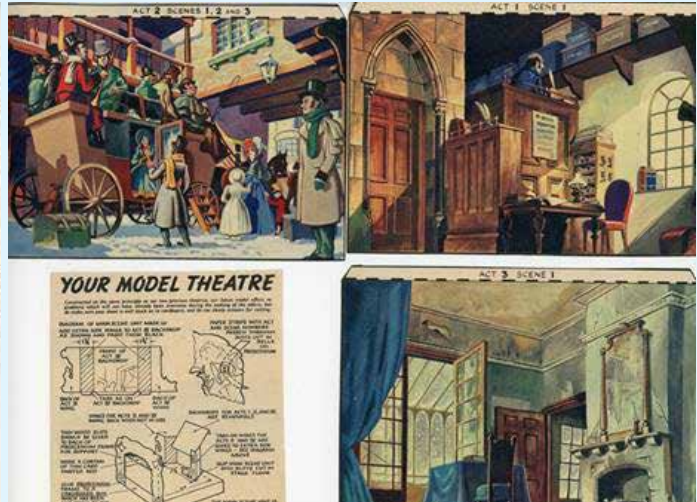


And even my old friend the Globe Theatre is available as a pop-up stage.

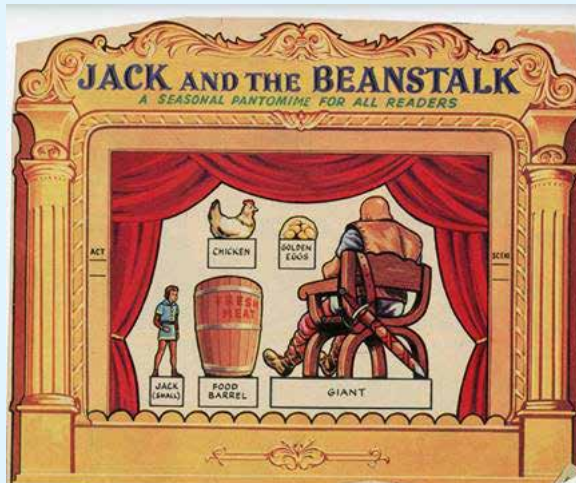


Toy theatres have also continued to be available in periodicals, especially in England with its rich tradition in this theatrical format. For example, the *Mickey Mouse Weekly*, published in England, featured some toy theatres for their readers in the 1950s. Three examples of this are *Christmas Tale*, *Jack and the Beanstalk*, and *Peter Pan*. The items shown are just part of each set – there are more scenes and characters for each.

Christmas Tale



Jack and the Beanstalk



Peter Pan



USING TOY THEATRE ITEMS FOR OTHER PURPOSES

I came across a fun idea for using the scenery from toy theatres. I found the idea on eBay, where toy theatre backdrops and wings were used as backdrops in shadow boxes for small dolls. What is nice is that today we can make these scenes any size on our computers and use them for a variety of doll sizes.



I have several sailor dolls that seemed to need a backdrop scene. I used the same harbor scene for both of them in the museum, and even though the dolls are quite different, I think they both look very much at home.

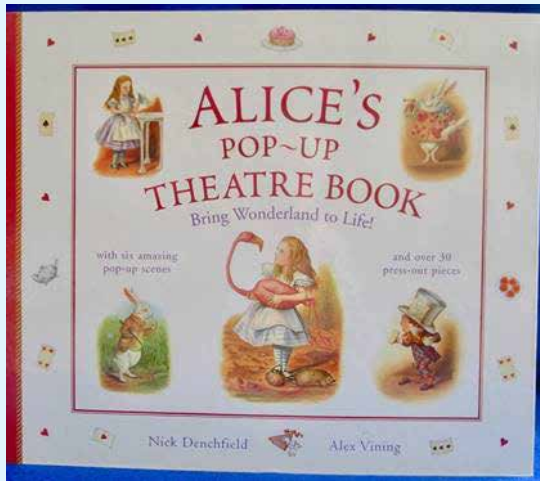


I have also found that some of the book theatres have worked well as displays. In the museum I have used both *The Wizard of Oz* and *Alice in Wonderland* books to display collections of teddy bear artist Deb Canham's miniature bears. This version of the *Wizard of Oz* included this wonderful stage scene. I am able to show 12 of Deb's *Wizard of Oz* miniature characters.

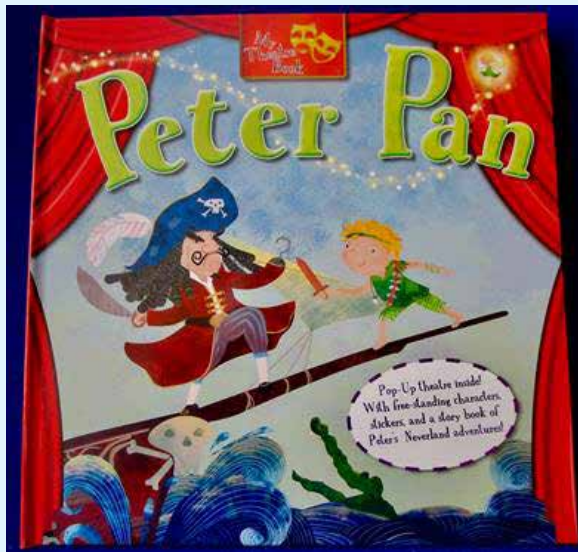


I thought that this stage scene was perfect for 7 of Deb's Alice characters including the Dormouse (front and center).

Although they are hard to see, Alice is even holding her flamingo and is standing near a hedgehog.



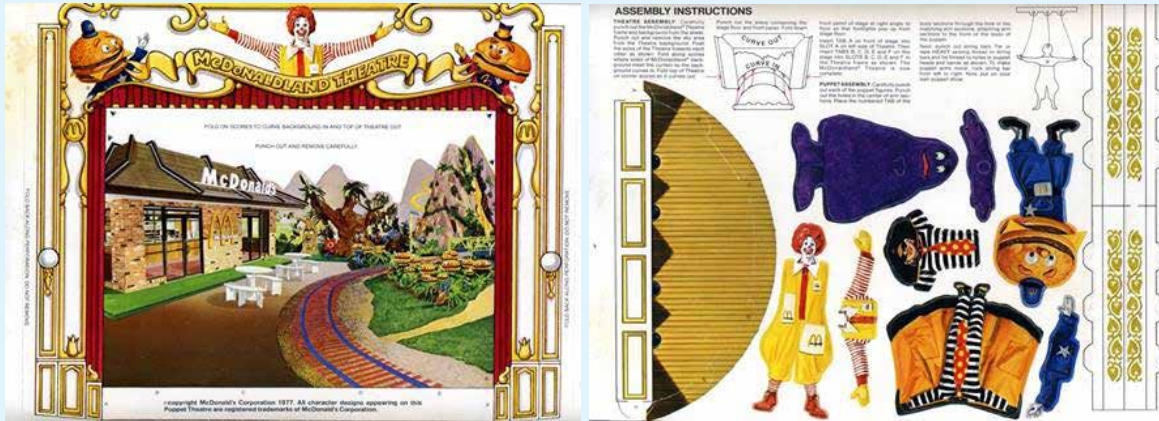
And this version of Peter Pan published by North Parade provides a number of possible scenes. Here are the characters with Captain Hook's pirate ship.



Disney also used a toy theatre format of a movie theatre on the front of the box containing a small set of Little Golden Books.



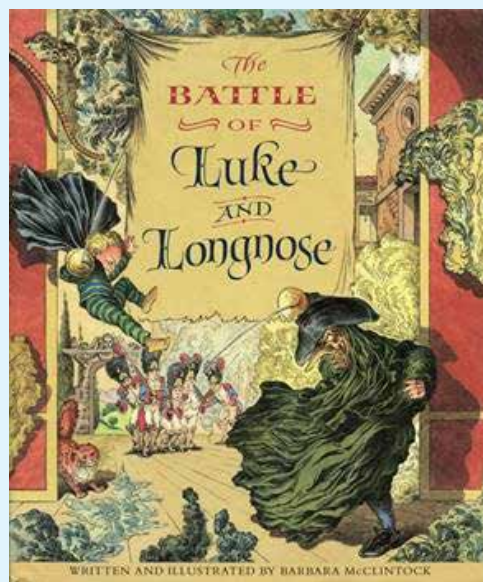
TOY THEATRES USED FOR ADVERTISING



Even McDonald's used a toy theater to appeal to young customers.

TOY THEATRES IN FICTIONAL BOOK STORIES

I have one example of a children's fictional book that involves a boy's dream that takes him into his toy theatre where most of the action takes place. It is *The Battle of Luke and Longnose* by Barbara McClintock.



TOY THEATRES FOR CONTEMPORARY DOLLS

Larger dolls by several companies have had toy theatres created for them. Perhaps the best known is Barbie's theatre created by Mattel. 11½" Barbie and Ken had a series of costumes that they could use on the stage to perform various shows.



Madame Alexander created a theatre and costumes for her 16" Little Women Journals series dolls to put on *Midsummer Night's Dream*. There is a reversible backdrop with one scene for the city and one for the forest. The costumes for each doll could be transformed into a second outfit, so that the four dolls could portray all of the characters in the play. Three of these pictures are from the 75th Madam Alexander Catalog in 1998. The first picture shows the forest as the backdrop, and the second picture shows the other side of the backdrop that has the city scenery.

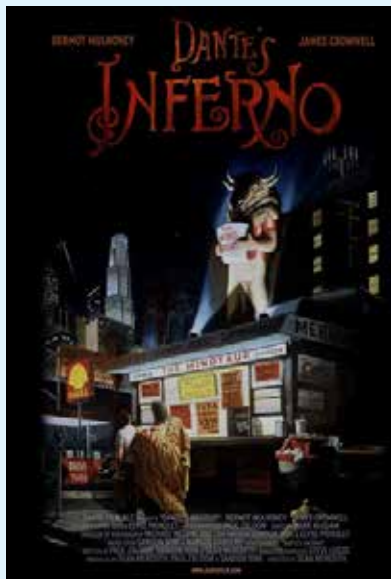


And a final example would be the stage for the 16" Clea Bella dolls. Clea Bella was touted as a three-way talent. She could act, dance, and sing. Some of the dolls were made with pointed toes for ballet shoes, and some were made with flatter feet for high heel shoes. This particular doll came with an extra arm to allow the owner to create additional poses. There is a three-panel backdrop that is magnetized, and different magnetized scenes can be attached to the front of the panels. I started with a garden scene, and was trying to decide on an interior scene, but the company went out of business before I ordered one. The 53" x 20"

garden scene is shown here with one of the Clea Bella dolls.



There have even been movies made utilizing the idea of the toy theatre. An example is an interesting version of *Dante's Inferno*. The movie was made in 2007 and is one hour and 28 minutes long. It was the best feature film in the 2007 Lausanne Underground Film Festival and received several other awards. Dermot Mulroney is the voice of Dante, and James Cromwell is Virgil. It has a modern urban setting and a more contemporary group of disreputable characters. It was put out on a DVD but unfortunately the DVD is out of print. An entry at IMDb includes a 2-minute video of the trailer that can be seen to give an idea of what the movie is like. It is certainly not for children, but it might inspire someone to make a similar kind of film on a more cheerful subject.



In conclusion, although new and original toy theatres ceased to be produced in the 19th century, they continued to influence many areas of publishing. Companies like Pollock's reprinted and reissued many of the original plays. And as we have seen, they have crept into our lives in many other ways – new kits and cut and paste books for making the theatres, books that use a toy theatre format in various ways, and new uses such as advertising and movies. I am constantly finding new samples to add to my museum collection.

As a final note, while doing research for this article, I came across information that finally answers my earliest questions about the model theatres in that upstairs room in the Cleveland Art Museum. And surprisingly there was also information about my old friend the Globe Theatre model. According to an article in the New York Times for August 31, 1941, a number of models of stages and theatres from the Museum of the Theatre of Yale Department of Drama were sent to the Cleveland Art Museum. These were used as an educational exhibit for Cleveland school children. I left Cleveland while still in elementary school. Had I been there longer, I might have had a teacher who would have arranged for a school trip to visit the models. In addition I found a second article, a recent news announcement from Cleveland State University (located near the Cleveland Museum of Art) stating that they had just finished renovations on a model of the Globe Theatre donated to them in the 1970s by the Cleveland Museum of Art. The Bonfoey Gallery provided a team of conservators to their neighbors, and the completed model was to be moved to the Middough Building at Playhouse Square. I am delighted for my old friend the Globe, but I hope that other models in the collection had as happy an ending.



Picture from a news announcement from the Cleveland State University.

Many of the books mentioned in this article are listed in Susan Quinlan's 308-page book "Reference Guide to Research on Dollhouses and Miniatures" – the most extensive bibliography covering 1,242 books published on dollhouses, miniatures, and related materials. If you are interested in obtaining a copy (\$14.95), it is available at www.quinlanmuseum.com Click on "Shop" on the left-side of the home page, then select "Books" (books are listed alphabetically).

Tour of Doll, Teddy Bear, Toy, Miniature & Dollhouse Museums

The next time you decide to take a trip, possibly this summer, you might consider visiting some of the wonderful museums around the country that display dolls, teddy bears, toys, miniatures and dollhouses. There are many museums on the internet that have closed the last few years and there are others that are not museums actually focused on these collectables. To avoid disappointment when you visit them, first check out our recently updated list of nearly 40 museums on our website (www.quinlanmuseum.com). On the home page, just click on “Other Museums” and select “Doll & Teddy Museums”. There is a link to each of their websites where you can see when they are open and what they have to offer.

Annual Christmas Gifting to Children

Each December, the Susan Quinlan Doll & Teddy Bear Museum give each visiting child a doll or teddy bear of their choice as a Christmas gift for spending the day with their accompanying parent or grandparent. Last year the children could choose from a wide variety of storybook dolls and teddy bears. These are a few of the happy visitors surrounded by some of the dolls and bears waiting to be taken home for the holidays.

