

A SHORT NOTE ON EROTIC MUSHROOM IMAGERY IN OLD AND MODERN POSTCARDS

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All collectors of postcards with mushroom motifs know that most of these cards use the Fly agaric (*Amanita muscaria*) as a good luck symbol. This role is rarely attributed to other mushrooms, although a fair number of cards showing the King bolete (*Boletus edulis*) as 'Glückspilz' were edited between 1900 and 1920 in Germany. Good luck leads to happiness and this blessed state is generally associated with love. Indeed, one finds both in France and Germany postcards in which mushrooms are depicted as love symbols, often even with a certain eroticism, if not frankly pornographic. However, cards in the latter category are rare and hard to find. Most often, one sees a couple of lovers in the shadow of a big Fly agaric (Fig. 1) or a mushroom that seems to be some compromise between this and a bolete! The two German cards (Figs 2 and 3) are photographs—apparently taken in a studio—showing lovers meeting near such a giant mushroom, and on one the significance of the encounter is highlighted by a short poem. Such cards were undoubtedly sent by young people in love. Often, the writing on such cards leaves little doubt on that score: on card no 3, sent on 21 February 1905 from Wommel (The Netherlands), the lady lets her lover know that she is afraid, but willing...

Other cards show couples in search of each other, for example Fig. 4 with the humanoid Fly agarics, where the good wishes for the New Year are accompanied by four-leaved clover, another good luck symbol. Furthermore, on a German Happy Birthday card we see a King bolete walking hand in hand with a most feminine Fly agaric (Fig. 5).

The consequences of these love stories, *i.e.* the babies, are certainly not forgotten. To give just one example (Fig. 6): one is supposed to look for those adorable babies under the mushroom! There are many variations on this theme. The father of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, considered mushrooms to be phallic symbols, which he saw nearly everywhere. One can scoff at this, but certain cards seem to confirm this view, for example that of the couple seated near the Parasol-Mushroom in its various developmental stages (Fig. 7). The adult form presented by the gentleman suggests the erection and the smile of the couple is rather equivocal...

It is interesting to note that recently postcards have been edited in France for the benefit of medical research on AIDS. Some of these show erotic scenery full of all kinds of fungi!

Curiously enough, the suggestive shape of the well-known Stinkhorn, *Phallus impudicus*, has not been a source of inspiration for the artists using erotic imagery in their postcards. It was only in the sixties that we saw a postcard (photograph) showing a full-blown Stinkhorn, accompanied by an ambiguous text (Fig. 8).

Figure 1.

Figure 2.

Figure 3.

Figure 4.

Figure 5.

Figure 6.

Figure 7.

Figure 8.

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