METAMORPHIC POSTCARDS
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Virtual Museum of Optical Illusions
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INTRODUCTION

Since Giuseppe Arcimboldo painted his metamorphic portraits (made up of fruits, flowers or little animals) in the 16th century, several artists decided to make this kind of composite paintings.

In particular, in the last decade of the 19th century, postcards with metamorphic caricatures of famous people or mythological characters became popular. There didn’t use to be much information about the author of the caricatures, sometimes not even the name of the publisher could be found.

In this book you can see almost seventy examples of metamorphic postcards. We include the name of the author in the few cases in which he is a known artist. However, we have found out an important fact: a lot of these metamorphic postcards were not totally original. They were inspired in photographs or classical portraits and the metamorphic artists replace the original faces with composite ones. This is why in some examples we will also present the original source.

Most of these postcards were published from 1890 to 1920, so we present here an old and fascinating collection. We hope you enjoy it.
1

About the artists
Two classical metamorphic postcards, both created by George A. Wotherspoon in the early 1900s.
Some classical postcard artists occasionally created metamorphic postcards, such as Arnold Taylor (figure 3), one of the most important artists of Bamforth, a British company specialized in humorous postcards. Also, Eugenio Colmo, alias Golia, an Italian caricaturist who made the portrait of Kaiser Wilhelm II (figure 4).
Several works of the French artist A. Moulin published in Paris (figures 5 to 9).
2

Being inspired
Some political metamorphic postcards were clearly based in photographs, such as Frank Josef I (figures 10 and 11), Emperor of Austria from 1848 until 1916, and Otto von Bismarck (figures 12 and 13), a Prussian/German statesman of the late 19th century.
Two other similar examples based on photographs: Francisco Ferrer (figures 14 and 15), Spanish pedagogue, and Abdul Hamid (figures 16 and 17), Sultan of the Ottoman Empire.
Several metamorphic postcards seem to be based on works by Fritz Rumpf, German painter (1888-1949). In this case the postcard (figure 20) is based on the Rumpf’s portrait of Frank Liszt (figure 19), which is at the same time based on a previous photograph (figure 18).
Another interesting sequence of photograph (figure 21), portrait (figure 22) and metamorphic postcard (figure 23), in this case the character is the Austrian composer Johann Strauss.
Metamorphic portraits of William Shakespeare (figure 24) and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (figure 27) are also based on Rump's paintings (figure 25 and 26, respectively).
Definitely, metamorphic postcards of Mozart (figure 28), Beethoven (figure 31) and Friedrich Schiller (figure 32) are works of the same unknown author. Again the non-metamorphic portraits (figures 29 and 30) are the paintings by Fritz Rumpf.
We have found three different metamorphic postcards of the German artist Friedrich Schiller. The first examples (figures 32 and 35) are also based on other postcards (figures 33 and 34 respectively) of an unknown author.
The third example (figure 36) is particularly interesting as you can recognize famous characters of Schiller’s works (like Joan of Arc, Fiesco or Mary Stuart) in the metamorphic face. The postcard is based on a well-known portrait of Schiller (you can find several versions of it, figure 37, by Anton Graff, is one of those examples).
3

Famous people
There are several metamorphic postcards of Napoleon Bonaparte. Figure 38 shows the most popular version, probably based on a drawing by Johann Michael Voltz, 1814 (figure 39 is a German version of Voltz’s drawing).
Le grand vainqueur, another example showing a front view of Napoleon’s face.

Figure 40
On this page, you can see two different postcards of Abdul Hamid, sultan of the Ottoman Empire (we saw a third example in figure 17). Figure 41 shows a Russian version of the metamorphic face, as figure 42 was probably printed in Germany.
Two political postcards: another portrait of Otto von Bismarck (figure 43, see figure 13 for another version) and the image of Georges Clemenceau (figure 44), Prime Minister of France at the beginning of the 20th century.
The last German emperor, Wilhelm II, is also present in these postcards (we saw his first portrait in figure 4). Now we see his face in a side view (figure 45) and as a part of a skull illusion (figure 46).
Figures 46 and 48 show two metamorphic skulls. In figure 47 we can see another representation of Wilhelm II (from 1915). The second one (figure 48) is signed by Mille.
Portrait of Ludwig van Beethoven (we saw another one in figure 31). This postcard was printed in Berlin, Germany.

Figure 49
Two different ways of representing Richard Wagner’s face. Although they are both in a profile view, you can see very different hidden figures in each one.
The couple and the guest
A frequent kind of metamorphic postcard is one showing a couple as part of a big head of a third person, usually a jealous witness of the scene.

The first three postcards of this chapter, (figures 52 to 54), were published in Russia and seem to be part of the same collection.

The postcards from figures 55 to 58 are not only similar, but also seem to include the same couple of characters.

Figure 52
Figure 53

Figure 54
Figure 55

Figure 56
As we saw in the first exhibit of our museum ("Skull optical illusions", August 2009 - July 2010), the metamorphic skull is a very popular example of optical illusions.

Here we show some new examples of metamorphic postcards where the third person is, in fact, a skull.

In the first example (figure 59), the skull is hidden behind two little girls.

Figure 59
Two more skull examples: a postcard published in 1908 by H. H. Rose (figure 60) and a frightening scene of a couple watching TV (figure 61).
5

What's in your mind
In this chapter you can see several postcards where the head of the characters is made up by figures representing what “they have in their minds”. These two postcards were published in Germany.
Two metamorphic women’s heads: *Source de Jeunesse* (figure 64) and *Xantippe* (figure 65).
The next three postcards seem to be works of the same author. In figures 66 and 67 you can read the same phrase: *Tempi passati* (Past times), but showing respectively a woman and a man.
The postcard in figure 68 is called *L’abbé* (The priest). A different artist is the author of *L’Eunuque* (Eunuch, figure 69).
Two portraits representing a satyr (figure 70) and a gourmand (figure 71)
Another kind of metamorphic illusions shows a horse made up by several human bodies, like this example, *Le Favori* (The favorite, figure 72)
6

Women on head
One of the most popular motifs of metamorphic postcards is a man’s face with a hidden female body somewhere in his head.

Sigmund Freud’s postcard (figure 75), by an unknown author, is surely the most famous example, but there are older ones.

For example, *A pipe dream* (figure 73), was published in New York in 1905. A similar picture was used in the advertisement of a Canadian hotel (see figure 74).
Figure 74

Figure 75
Two more examples featuring an Indian Chief (figure 76) and the Devil himself (figure 77).
You can find other designs of metamorphic postcards including naked women, such as these images of a man with a hat (figure 78) or the one of a horse head (figure 79).
Two different representations of Mephisto.
Finally, composite heads of a faun (figure 82) and of the Devil (figure 83)
CREDITS

Figures 3, 7, 14, 38, 40, 42, 51, 59, 61, 64, 65, 72, 73, 74, 77, 78, 81, 82, Juan Luis Roldán (private collection).
Figures 12, 15, 18, 20, 21, 37, 39 Wikimedia Commons
Figure 47 Courtesy of Mariana Pinheiro.