

LOVE ME, LOVE MY TULPA

By Ian White

When you were a kid, did you ever have an imaginary friend? If you didn't, you missed out, because imaginary friends are great. They laugh at your bad jokes, they play games with you when there's no one else around (although they're not so good at sports), and when your parents ask you who broke the vase or why your bedroom still looks like a tornado hit it, your imaginary friend is always there to take responsibility.

I still blame my imaginary friend for stuff like leaving the lights on or forgetting to lock the back door, and I'm almost 49.

OK. That last sentence was a lie. I'm nearly 50.

And the other reason that sentence was a lie — if I still had an imaginary friend at my age, we'd have known each other so long that now I'd probably be able to see him. I'd certainly be able to hear him talk. I'd know his personal history, I'd know his likes and dislikes, and chances are my imaginary friend would even take off to do his own thing from time to time because by now he would have developed his own independent personality. Maybe he might do bad things. Maybe he might make me do bad things.

You may even be able to see him too. Because he wouldn't be my imaginary friend anymore. He would be a tulpa.

What Does the Word *Tulpa* Mean?

Tulpa is a Sanskrit word meaning “a construct,” a non-physical entity born from its creator's imagination — in essence, a thought-form. Tulpa is also a concept used in Tibetan Buddhism, a spiritual discipline designed to teach the student about the disintegrated barrier between the material and immaterial worlds, the real and the imaginary, the philosophy that reality is actually a magical illusion.

A very early Buddhist text, although it doesn't reference the word *tulpa*, says that one of the “fruits of the



“Perfect Friend” — Illustration by Michelle Hébert. 2009.
(<https://www.flickr.com/photos/michellehebert/>)

contemplative life” is the ability to create a “mind-made body” and travel the “Bodhi” (a kind of mindstream) that leads to the heavenly dimensions.

As far as the tulpa-as-spiritual-discipline is concerned, it can also be a trap. Even though the Buddhist student who creates a Tulpa will perceive it and interact with it as if it were genuinely real, and is even told by his Masters that the Tulpa is an actual deity, it will in truth always be a hallucination. If the student ever believes it is more than a hallucination, he has failed his training and he will forever be condemned to the hallucinatory world he has created.

However, there is another take on the Buddhist tulpa that it is actually “a God in ritual,” a thought-form that — if successful — becomes a home to the God for whom it has been invoked. Once the God is resident, the Tulpa is no longer just a projection of the imagination.



How Does a Tulpa Manifest?

According to the book *Thought Forms* by Annie Besant and C.W. Leadbeater, a thought-form/tulpa can manifest in different ways. It can either become the duplicate image of its creator or assume the image of some other material object (which can literally be anything; I recently heard from a man whose Tulpa allegedly looks like a bookcase that keeps him awake at night complaining about his reading habits ... no, I am not making that up). Or the Tulpa can take on a form entirely of its own choosing, which immediately suggests it already has a personality and intent independent from its creator.

In my article about occult cinema in last month's issue, I mentioned that the golem was the first tulpa committed to film. But taking the proviso that a tulpa is a thought-form and the mythical golem was a material giant formed out of clay and given life via a magical Hebrew word, it could be argued that the golem wasn't actually a tulpa at all.

However, because the golem was initially developed from the imagination of its creator and his concentrated intent to protect the Jews of Prague from antisemitic attacks, the golem does roughly fit the tulpa paradigm.

In fact, taking the golem as a precedent, other magical creatures — Imps, Homunculi, Servitors, Egregor, and even a witch's Familiar — could be considered forms of tulpas because they are energized by the will and intent (and sometimes feed upon the life-blood) of their creator to perform their master's or mistress' bidding.

Alexandra David-Neel, a French-born Buddhist and the first woman to ever attain the rank of Tibetan lama, is most widely credited with bringing the phenomenon of tulpa into the Western consciousness. After being taught the concept by Buddhist monks, she devoted many months of her life to creating a tulpa of her own — a benevolent Friar Tuck-like character she borrowed from the English legend of Robin Hood.

After a long period of deep meditation, during which

David-Neel visualized the tulpa's form, character, and biographical history, the mind-monk began to appear on her peripheral vision. Sometimes she could feel him touching her. David-Neel described her creation as "a kind of guest" who would even accompany her when she went traveling. And members of her traveling party began to see him too. But when the friendly chubby-cheeked fellow began a slow, sinister transformation and, in David-Neel's own words, "assumed a vaguely ... malignant look ... became more troublesome and bold," she realized she had lost control.

It apparently took David-Neel more than six months to "unimagine" the tulpa and vanish it back into nothingness, and the tulpa fought David-Neel every step of the way. Now that it had known existence, it did not want to leave, proving beyond doubt that the creation of a tulpa is not something that should be entered into lightly. Even

for the most capable practitioner, it can be an extremely dangerous exercise.

"Sometimes the phantom [i.e., the tulpa] becomes a rebellious son, and one

hears of uncanny struggles that have taken place between magicians and their creatures, the former being severely hurt or even killed by the latter," David-Neel wrote in her book *Magic and Mysticism in Tibet*. She also wrote, "Once the tulpa is endowed with enough vitality to play the part of a real being, it tends to free itself — nearly mechanically — from its maker's control, just as the child, when his body is completed and [he is] able to live apart, leaves its mother's womb."

Can Good Tulpas Turn Bad?

Josh Crawley, an incredible wealth-of-knowledge on the tulpa phenomenon, who I made contact with via the fascinating and extremely informative Website <http://www.tulpa.info/>, has his own thoughts about why good tulpae can turn bad.

"My guess is that a human-form tulpa sees other humans," he told me, "and, unlike physical humans,

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cannot easily interact with other humans. This almost-real-but-not-quite greatly angers them. This is just conjecture but I've heeded those warnings of 'Don't create a human-form tulpa.'"

Chupi from tulpa.info gave me this overview, not just of what a tulpa is, but how it can impose itself upon its creator: "A tulpa is an independent being, perceived in the mind's eye only – at least at

first. Some learn to see their tulpa(s) in the real world, appearing as real as everything else. They still cannot truly affect physical objects or other people, though with some trickery they can appear to and have the experience of doing so by manipulating an illusory copy of that thing.

"Most of this [tulpa.info] community takes a scientific, psychological view of tulpas. We see them as tied to us since they

reside in our brains, and the only way they can affect the outside world is through our own bodies (or maybe in the future through a brain-computer interface of some sort). Some of us choose to let our tulpas do and experience things through our bodies. We use the terms 'possession' and 'switching' to describe this.

"For possession, the tulpa is allowed to control either all or part of the host's body. It is usually done with explicit permission and feels basically like part or all of you is moving on its own. There is also often a feeling of their presence in the body when they're possessing, though when they do it, it doesn't feel creepy. It is similar to the difference between hearing footsteps in the other room when you're alone in your house versus when you have a friend over – one is a cause for alarm, the other (the tulpa) is someone you know just doing their thing.

"Switching is similar to possession, but the host dissociates him/herself from the body, either with or without help from the tulpa. At this point, the tulpa is in control of the body and the host has either gone to the mindscape or been imposed outside the body in an illusory form.

"It's called 'switching' because the host lives basically how a tulpa normally lives, while the tulpa is the only one in the body, as is the usual case for a normal person. This is usually done for fairly short periods, but it gets a

lot easier with practice. There are some who can switch in a second."

The Creation of a Tulpa

Jennifer, who lives in London, told me she has created several tulpae over the past few years. She describes her experiences this way:



"For me, a tulpa usually begins as an emotional reaction that quickly gains form and personality and starts to talk to me inside my head. I know what it looks like, but I don't always see it in the real world. More often I can feel its presence, like a chill running down my spine, when the tulpa is near. And when it talks to me I hear its voice distinctly inside my head.

"This is the point when I have to be care-

ful, because the tulpa will usually try to trick me into believing it is a real being that exists outside my imagination. Most tulpas like to lie. They like to fool your senses into believing you can feel them, touch them, smell them, taste them. Some tulpas want you to feel pain and, because they are generated from inside your own mind, they know how to turn your mind against you. It's a bit like taking drugs when you're mentally already in a really bad place – the effects are never good. You can harm yourself, you can harm other people, and most times you won't even know what you've done until after it's finished."

Liam, a chaos magick practitioner from Cornwall (site of many of Britain's Arthurian legends) is less suspicious of his tulpa's intentions. "I've never had a tulpa 'go rogue,'" he told me. "On the whole, having a tulpa can be really beneficial because it tends to work as a mediator between me and my subconscious. If I want to remember something I've forgotten, the tulpa can find the memory inside my head and bring it to me.

"When I tore a muscle recently, my tulpa blocked the pain. If I have a bad experience, something I'll never want to remember again, my tulpa can dissolve it like it never happened."

Liam said he has never had a tulpa try to impose itself, but that's not because it hasn't developed its own

personality. “A tulpa will always become its own being,” he said. “And I’ve had tulpas that disagree with me and warn me that what I’m doing might not be the right thing, but they never try to force the issue or take my body over. It’s all about setting parameters.”

Is It All in Your Mind? The Philip Experiment

Back to Josh from tulpa.info: “The viewpoint of the ‘it’s all in your mind’ is espoused mainly by the material physicalists. They essentially think that the tulpa phenomenon is a sort of brain multi-processing within the confines of a mental illness, but that view also requires there can be no shared states like other people seeing or hearing my tulpa.

“Those that work with the occult have seen proof that this view is in error. *Occult* comes from the Latin root-word *oculus* and pertains to the eye/sight. Occult simply means ‘hidden from the eye.’ Many groups that have studied the occult find that *mind* is everything. Mind gives the energy for the tulpa to live. Mind makes the tulpa.

“Personally, my tulpas have been sensed by numerous other people. One person specifically called out the shape of one of my tulpas. Another person jumped out of the way when my tulpa was flying around, and one of my tulpas even pestered a good friend by talking to them when they were trying to sleep.”

Which leads me to another question: Is it possible that some phenomena we perceive as ghosts or poltergeists can actually be tulpas?

In 1972, the Toronto Society for Psychic Research (TSPR) — under the auspices of Dr. Alan Owen and his wife Iris May — began The Philip

Experiment, an attempt to prove that a “ghost” can be deliberately psychokinetically manufactured from the focused imaginations of a group of like-minded participants, essentially, that the supernatural is nothing more than a manifestation of the mind and that our fears and anxieties create our own ghosts.

Dr. Owen and his group of eight participants created a fictional character called Philip Aylesford, an English aristocrat who was born in 1624 and lived at Diddington Hall in Warwickshire (which is an actual place). They even drew a sketch of him.

Philip was married unhappily to the beautiful but overbearing Dorothea, and he eventually fell in love with a young Gypsy-girl called Margo, who quickly became his mistress. When Dorothea discovered her husband’s infidelity, she accused Margo of witchcraft and her rival was subsequently condemned and burned at the stake.

Heartbroken, Philip committed suicide by hurling himself off the battlements of Diddington Hall.

As we can see, their tale contains all the elements of a great tragic ghost story — a doomed illicit romance with pagan Gypsy undertones, a bitter cuckolded wife, and accusations of witchcraft followed by the violent deaths of both key-players.

In the book *Conjuring Up Philip* Dr. Owen explained, “It was essential that Philip be a totally fictitious character — not merely a figment of the imagination but clearly and obviously so, with a biography full of historical errors.”

They began the experiment in September 1972, but initially with little success. It wasn’t until almost a year later when Dr. Owen introduced a séance element to their sittings that Philip began to reveal his presence via table-tilting and table-rapping. Philip communicated with the group through a series of “yes” or “no” answers and was easily able to respond to questions about his own fictitious history; although, when questions went beyond the biography the group had created, Philip would fall silent. He could, however, answer questions about real historical events and people, which Dr. Owen believed was due to the groups own collective unconscious.

One of the sessions was video-recorded for television. Strange sounds were heard, lights flickered, and some people even believed they heard whispers answering their questions

(not captured by the microphones). The table levitated and, still beneath the fingertips of the sitters, shoved its way dramatically across the room, jamming one of the group members against the wall. Participants would often describe

the table as feeling “electrified” whenever Philip was present.

Chupi at tulpa.info suggests that The Philip Experiment “could very reasonably produce a tulpa: visualizing and talking to a being, willing him to exist and be independent. However, since our view of tulpas is mental, there can’t really be a tulpa separate from the brains that created him/her. It could be that everyone there made their own Philip ‘tulpa-like’ being that believed himself to be the same being as all the others [were imagining] and that the participants were all ‘synced’ to each other through normal verbal and body language, etc., communication.”

Although considered a success, The Philip Experiment never materialized an apparition and — contrary to Alexandra David-Neel’s experience — Philip didn’t try to hang around when he knew he wasn’t wanted. As soon as one of the participants accidentally told Philip he wasn’t real, they lost contact with him forever.

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New Tulpa Experiments Materialize

Earlier this year, Hammer Films released a movie inspired by *The Philip Experiment* called *The Quiet Ones*. It's an interesting but badly flawed film, and it has absolutely nothing to do with what happened in Toronto.

Still, the TSPR were so encouraged by Dr Owen's research, they assembled a completely new group of people and tried again, this time creating a new ghost/tulpa called Lilith, a French Canadian spy from World War II. Similar experiments by various other groups produced characters as diverse as medieval alchemists and men from the future, and although none of the entities materialized, they were all allegedly able to communicate with the sitters in their own ways and even sometimes capable of communicating with each other.

I have even been told a story about someone who created numerous Tulpae until one of the Tulpa became jealous of the others and then locked the creator inside his own "wonderland" (the place a host goes to when she/he allows the Tulpa to switch into their body). It apparently took a lot of frantic negotiating before the Tulpa was placated enough to allow the host to switch back into himself.

Outside of Philip, perhaps the most notable ghost/tulpa experiment was (is — because some sources claim it is still ongoing) The Skippy Experiment, led by paranormal researcher Michael Williams. It is also often referred to as The Sydney Experiment after the Australian city where it took place.

The "ghost," Skippy Cartman, was a naïve and over-protected 14-year-old girl who developed a crush on her Catholic school teacher who quickly began an affair with her, made Skippy pregnant, and then, to avoid discovery and the ruin of his reputation in the church, murdered the child and buried her corpse beneath the floorboards of an abandoned shearing shed.

By the time Skippy's body was found, she was so badly decomposed that evidence of her pregnancy was lost forever. The teacher (whose name, interestingly, was Brother Monk: shades of Alexandra David-Neel's Friar Tuck tulpa?) had already relocated to another town.

So, although Skippy's tragic story was mired in more

modern times, it still carried the doomed and violent romance of *The Philip Experiment's* bio.

The six Skippy participants met once a week for five months, without any result. It was, according to one of the participants, only when they changed the kind of table they were sitting around that Skippy began to communicate via gentle taps and scratching sounds, which they could often feel coming (seemingly) from inside the table. However, despite promises to the contrary, no video or audio evidence was ever released to the public, so the apparent success of *The Skippy Experiment* remains negligible.



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Tulpas vs. Poltergeists

So, although these experiments in no way invalidate the existence of ghosts and other truly supernatural forces, they do suggest that the power of imagination and regular mental commitment can psychokinetically manifest a "fictional" entity that has some degree of individual intelligence.

I wondered if poltergeists could ever fall within the tulpa category — not on the basis that they are consciously and deliberately created by the host's mind, but that the host inadvertently creates the poltergeist via an uncontrolled and unconscious release of heightened emotion — usually anger, anxiety, or fear.

Dr. Barry Taff also believes in the tulpa phenomena and very kindly supplied me with three chapters from his book, all of which refer to the subject of tulpa. Although, Dr. Taff never describes them by that name. One of the chapters, about the real-life "Entity" case (arguably the investigation for which Dr. Taff is most famous), really struck a chord with me.

Doris Bither, who was the alleged victim of "spectral rape" at the center of the Entity case, claimed she was regularly assaulted by three poltergeist-like entities and that a male figure was also witnessed in her room. In Dr. Taff's excellent retelling, he explains that Doris was a single mother with four children — three of them male, two of those teenagers — and that the family vibe was anything but harmonious. In fact, he describes the relationship between Doris and her children as "downright belligerent." There seemed to be an obvious correlation

between the three male specters that attacked Doris and the fact that she and her three sons did not get along. So, I wondered if — in some nasty, oedipal way — the spirits may have been tulpa-like projections unconsciously generated by the three young men.

Dr. Taff agreed my assessment was right on the money, and that “of course there was an oedipal relationship at work there with RSPK at its core.”

But what if a Tulpa isn't purely a thought-form? What if it begins as part of the host's imagination and then something else — say, a demonic entity floating around in the ether looking for somewhere to land — decides to inhabit the Tulpa's “shell” and have some fun? That's one of the theories about The Philip Experiment — that the group didn't actually create Philip, but that something darker picked up on what they were doing and pretended to be Philip so it could communicate with the sitters. After all, it's common knowledge that when a demon wants to break through, it often mimics something far more innocent — like a young child or a lost, benign spirit — to win over our trust.

There is often confusion between the tulpa and the demonic. Josh at tulpa.info told me: “The ‘demonic’ pulls a great negative connotation due to shared Christian culture. Demonic must mean Satan or Lucifer, whoever that really is. It could mean Set-an, referring to the Egyptian God of the Underworld. Or there's the fact that Lucifer means ‘light-bringer.’ Light-bringers have always been denigrated. We only have to look at Pro-

metheus and Loki to see that. “Speaking of demonic magic, there are mainly two types: the Qlipphoth (reverse of the Sephiroth of the Kaballah), and the Goetia. Unfortunately, they are given ‘demonic’ as their

names. The Qlipphoth and Sephiroth are like opposite faces of the same coin. Through one, you can know the other. The Goetia is different. The idea came from the 72 demons that Solomon captured and imprisoned. The gist is that through the knowledge they can bring, one can know both good and bad. And one can heal or harm with magics.

“A given example: One can heal a person from cancer by killing the tumor. Or, one can heal the tumor, killing the person from cancer. This same idea applies with ‘demonic’ knowledge. They teach, if heeded. And it is up to the person to apply their ethics.”

Tulpas and Mental Illness

For many people, belief in tulpa could also be a sign of undiagnosed mental illness. Author, Parapsychologist, and Founder of the Scientific Establishment of Parapsy-

chology Stephen Mera told me, “Although I have not come across the tulpa phenomenon personally, I am aware of some studies suggesting preclusive answers in evidence of a non-schizophrenic behavior. Some scientists believe the answers lie in Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID) or Dissociative Disorder Not Otherwise Specified (DDNOS), but unfortunately there is little study in this field with limited answers.”

Chupi at tulpa.info added, “Mental disorders are not tulpa. There was a member on the forum who had what she thought was a tulpa who would forcibly take control and make her do things she didn't want to, and claimed he could affect others but had no evidence of it. She came back months later to say she had been diagnosed with schizophrenia and that the treatment she was receiving for that was helping.”

Another member from another Tulpa forum, who asked to remain nameless, told me, “Tulpa practitioners are aware that altering their mindset to believe another entity is present when there is, in fact, nothing there could be dancing very closely on the edge of schizophrenia. The trick is never to forget that what you have created is your own delusion and that if controlled skillfully the tulpa can give you access to previously uncharted regions of your own subconscious.”

Although the word tulpa will be new to many of us, the concept of an entity made material by the group imagination is a common theme in literature and urban myth. Clive Barker's *Candyman* (from his short story *The Forbidden*)

is a tragic hook-handed monster who is only brought to life because enough people believe in his legend that their fear makes him real. As I mentioned in last month's issue, the filmmaker Wes Craven even believed that his

character Freddy Krueger had become a kind of tulpa and influenced the serial killer Richard Ramirez.

In its own way, even the Slender Man meme has become a full-fledged tulpa following the brutal attempted murder of a young Wisconsin schoolgirl by two of her 12-year-old classmates. The classmates, who had apparently been planning the attack for several months, allegedly lured their victim into the woods and stabbed her 19 times as a sacrifice to Slender Man, believing that Slender Man would possess them and make them his proxies (servants).

In 2012, the Italian director Federico Zampaglione made an intriguing giallo-horror film called *Tulpa*, which, although not directly related to the tulpa phenomena, was inspired by the subject. When I asked Federico about *Tulpa* he said, “Tulpa is a concept that really captivated me since the first time I heard of it. After the first person told

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me about this incredible phenomenon I immediately said, 'Let's make a movie about this; it's completely intriguing.'

"I do believe that our own mind, in very particular cases, is able to create supernatural forces, and in this sense I can accept the idea of creating a tulpa by meditation and discipline. Especially if you are a monk who spends his whole life trying to work on a form of potent energy. In my film, indeed, tulpa is more like a metaphor of a double life ... two completely different persons living in the same body."

And then Federico offered a warning: "I would advise people who may want to experiment this idea of creating a tulpa ... don't try to mess around with these kind of entities. You can seriously regret it."

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Tulpas vs. God vs. The Devil

Before we finish, I just want to mention something else I've been wondering about: People who are devoutly religious, who regularly pray and spend their time in spiritual contemplation, often describe "feeling" their God beside them, being able to talk to their God and experience His presence as something real and tangible.

Isn't their sustained prayer and contemplation very similar to the kind of intense regular and focused meditation it takes to create a tulpa? And doesn't that sense of invisible presence sound very much like the experience described by so many "Tulpamancers?" This led me to think, could God — however we choose to perceive Him — actually be a kind of Tulpa? And if that was the case, why wouldn't the God-tulpa manifest to make our world a better place?

With everything that's happening across the globe right now, more and more people are convinced the "end times" are approaching, the apocalyptic belief that Satan and his legions are now powerfully asserting themselves and that a *Book of Revelations*-worthy Armageddon is just around the corner. I'm not particularly religious, and I don't personally agree with that kind of hysterical doomsday scenario, but I can understand why others do. So, hypothetically, and given that a lot of people believe as fervently in the Devil as they do in God, why aren't the God and Satan tulpas down here right now, duking it out for control of humanity? And if they are, why does Satan seem to be winning?

I've got a slightly (OK, extremely) crazy theory about that one. Please humor me, because it's been a long day. We all have different conceptions of God — what He looks like, who He is, what we want from Him. Despite the meditations of all God's followers — and I'm talking about Christians, Moslems, Buddhists etc., all of them with a very unique idea of what God is about — it would

be almost impossible to conjure Him up as a coherent thought-form because very few of us would agree on the details. Let's face it, we wouldn't even agree on what He looks like. So, as far as a tulpa goes, a God-tulpa would barely make it out of the starting gate.

But the Devil is a different case. No matter what religion we follow — even if we don't follow a religion at all — most of us immediately know what the Devil looks like, who he is, and what his agenda is on Earth. So, maybe, the more bad things we hear about, the more bad that occurs in the world, the more fear we have about our lives and about the future, the more we unconsciously give the Devil-tulpa power, and make it stronger.

So here's what I'm proposing. Remember the 80s? OK, I'll pretend you don't. Well, back in the 1980s there was a massive event called Live Aid — a rock concert featuring most of Europe and America's major pop stars that took place simultaneously in the U.K. and the U.S. — was watched by a phenomenal proportion of the Earth's population and was designed to "feed the world" and bring an end to famine in Africa, as well as boost album sales (but that's probably just me being cynical).

So Live Aid didn't exactly accomplish what it set out to do and eradicate famine forever, but arguably the money and the global awareness it raised made a significant if temporary contribution to the fight against Third World poverty and starvation.

Strap yourselves in for this next paragraph.

What I'd like us all to do is create an ongoing global event called LIVE TULPA — all of us universally agreeing on the physical form, personality, and intent of an imaginary golem-like tulpa we jointly imagine into existence to make the world a better place. And because everyone I've spoken to seems to agree on at least one thing — that a tulpa should never be created in human form — I'm going to suggest the tulpa should look like Snoopy, when he was dressed as a fighter pilot (because that whole flying goggles and permanently stretched-out-scarf look would make for great positive symbolism).

Of course, then some diabolical terrorist group will conjure up a djinn and before we know it, it'll be "Djinn vs. Snoopy-the-Tulpa," which actually sounds like a fantastic idea for a PlayStation game ...

With thanks to everyone who kindly gave me their invaluable advice, knowledge and patience: Donna Nobillis McCaw, Chupi and Josh at tulpa.info, Dr Barry Taff, Stephen Mera, Federico Zampaglione, Jennifer, and Liam. ♦