

Summary of “Text 38 — The Secrets of Dr. Taverner”

General framework

The text is an extensive commentary on and summary of seven stories from the book *The Secrets of Dr. Taverner* by Dion Fortune (1890–1946), a well-known Welsh occultist. Dr. Taverner is the literary alter ego of Theodore Moriarty, a physician who treated patients in early twentieth-century London using unconventional, paranormal, and magical methods. We have briefly summarized and explained each story. We have also consistently confronted Taverner’s pagan, magical approach with a dynamically understood Christianity.

Key concepts

The text distinguishes three levels of reality:

Nature: the visible, material world

Supernature: the paranormal realm in which Taverner operates

Divine Supernature: the Christian realm of the “Holy,” the Trinity

Two kinds of subtle energy are distinguished: extra-biblical (pagan) energy, often generated through sexual rites, and biblical energy, originating in the Trinity. The author argues that extra-biblical religions may indeed solve concrete problems in life, but that their solutions often work unpredictably and vampirically, and may bring human beings under the influence of beings without conscience — “the elements of the world” or “the harmony of opposites.”

The seven stories

1. The Vampire

A shell-shocked soldier, Donald Craigie, becomes the unconscious victim of the etheric ghost of a deceased German soldier, which drains his life force (prana). Taverner discovers that Donald is not the perpetrator but the victim: the etheric body of a dead person has attached itself to him through a tear in his aura. By placing Donald in a hospital protected by a subtle-material dome, luring the ghost out with bait (his fiancée Beryl), and magically destroying the entity, Taverner frees him. The story illustrates how war can produce vampirism and how one must take both the victim and the subtle-material perpetrator into account.

2. The Restoration of the Ritual

A stolen magical ritual from a medieval Florentine lodge resurfaces in 1920s London. Taverner consults the “akasha” (the memory of the world) in a trance and discovers that the original thief, Pierro della Costa, has reincarnated as Peter Robson. Through magical influence, he leads

Robson/Pierro to return the manuscript to his lodge, after which Pierro expresses his remorse and is readmitted. This story shows how occult initiations can extend across lives — and incarnations.

3. The Man Who Sought

Pilot Arnold Black survives a crash and thereafter feels a compelling need to find a woman. Taverner consults the akasha and discovers that Arnold and a young woman, Eliane, had been happily married in all their previous lives except for one life in Egypt, where he was killed as a beggar by falling from the roof of a palace. The similarity between that fall and the dive of the aircraft brought the memory to the surface. Eventually Arnold's discarnate body materializes beside Eliane, and through her love he returns to his body. They marry.

4. The Soul That Did Not Want to Be Born

Mona Cailey has been completely absent since birth. Through self-hypnosis, Taverner discovers that in a previous life she was Carla Bianchetti, the daughter of an Italian duke who rejected a man, Giovanni Sigmundi, and handed him over to his enemies. At birth, she caught a glimpse of her karma and her soul refused to bear the burden. When Hodson, the reincarnation of Sigmundi, is admitted to the hospital with shell shock and lays his head in her lap, her soul slowly comes to life. Eventually she accepts her fate by letting him go with his fiancée, thereby repaying her debt.

5. The Scented Poppy Heads

Three successive heirs commit suicide by jumping from a window. Taverner discovers that black magic has been used: a moonstone attuned to suicide was hidden among scented poppy heads. The stones carry a mental image of suicide which is impressed upon the victims' subconscious through the scent. Taverner locates the perpetrator and makes him "clairvoyant" through a séance, forcing the man to confront his own naked soul. The guilty man cannot bear this and throws himself into the river.

6. The Hound of Death

Martin is pursued at night by a subtle-material black dog that tries to leap at his throat. Taverner recognizes it as a thought-form created by a black lodge, originating from Anthony Mortimer, an occultist who had forced Martin's beloved, Miss Hallam, into an engagement through suggestion. Taverner turns the thought-form against its creator: the dog follows Mortimer home. The following morning Mortimer is found dead ten miles away.

7. The Swapping of Habitations

The dying patient Winnington, an initiate of a lodge, exchanges his subtle-material body with that of his cocaine-addicted neighbor, John Bellamy, while in a coma. Upon awakening, Winnington's body is found to contain John Bellamy's personality — and vice versa. Rhodes discovers this when "Winnington" does not recognize her and says that he is John Bellamy. Taverner allows the situation to run its course: two people are now happy, while one is dissatisfied. But when Winnington, in John's body, dies of tuberculosis, John's released spirit becomes a dangerous, earth-bound entity. Taverner warns that the real problems are only beginning.

Recurring themes

Reincarnation and karma: Many lives constitute an evolution of consciousness; the "individuality" (the soul throughout all incarnations) versus the "personality" (the personality of a single incarnation).

Subtle-material bodies and the aura: In addition to the biological body, human beings possess an etheric and astral body; the aura reflects their moral and spiritual state.

Thought-forms: Sustained thoughts can become independent subtle-material beings (such as Fortune's revenge demon or David-Néel's tulpa).

The akasha: A "memory of the world" in which all thoughts and deeds are recorded and which can be consulted in trance.

The sacred as taboo: Objects, places, and persons can be "charged" on the subtle-material level; too abrupt a confrontation with the sacred can be dangerous.

The confrontation between pagan magic and Christianity: The author repeatedly argues that extra-biblical magic may be powerful, but is morally unreliable ("the harmony of opposites"), whereas the Trinity offers a purer, more powerful, and more reliable energy.

The addition (38.9)

The text ends with a French testimony by Jean Marquès-Rivière about a Tibetan ceremony in which a deceased lama transfers his consciousness into the body of an eight-year-old child. The author draws attention to expressions such as "horrible ceremony," "the child cries," and "deathly pale," and argues

that a grave injustice is being done to the child — a warning against the uncritical admiration of such practices.