



## No Fleecing Here

A Review of

*The Psychology of Theft and Loss: Stolen and Fleeced*

by Robert Tyminski

New York, NY: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2014. 185 pp.

ISBN 978-0-415-83088-1 (hardcover); ISBN 978-0-415-83089-8

(paperback); ISBN 978-1-315-77976-8 (e-book). \$185.00,

hardcover; \$48.95, paperback

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0038162>

Reviewed by

John C. Gonsiorek 

I came to Jungian analyst Robert Tyminski's profound and scholarly meditation on the meanings of theft and loss via a circuitous route. Having been schooled in a strongly logical positivist/"dust-bowl empiricism" approach to psychology, I had always felt I was visiting an exotic foreign land when I ventured into Jungian-derived works—which, admittedly, I did rarely.

When I was appointed founding editor of American Psychological Association (APA) Division 44's new journal *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*, I thought I should familiarize myself with content in the journal's potential purview with which I was less familiar. Because the journal's mission is to cover all psychological areas related to sexual orientation and gender diversity, and my career had focused on clinical and forensic psychology, I had some catch-up to do in aspects of psychology less familiar to me. Some of this was formal, along the lines of reading material outside my area deemed important by colleagues; some less formal, more along the lines of perusing both public libraries and those of friends for materials unfamiliar to me.

It was via this less formal route that I stumbled across the volume edited by Hopcke, Carrington, and Wirth (1993), a competent (if now dated) introduction to Jungian thought on gay and lesbian issues of which I was only dimly aware. Still, I connected with this material in only an intellectual, arm's-length way. The second volume I stumbled upon, Lingiardi's (2002) grand tour of symbolic representations of male homosexualities, deeply captured my imagination: Here was a synthesis of clinical case study, mythology, Jungian theory, historical commentary, cultural studies, and other components woven into a tapestry like I had not previously experienced. I was not sure what to make of some of it, but it left me wanting more.

So, when the opportunity came to review Tyminski's book *The Psychology of Theft and Loss: Stolen and Fleeced*, I jumped on it. It promised a similar multidisciplinary grand sweep, this

time on topics far afield from sexuality: theft and loss. I am pleased to report that Tyminski's volume is even more riveting than Lingardi's impressive work.

Tyminski's volume leads with an introduction focusing on varieties of theft ranging from the literal and mundane to the more symbolic, followed by a rationale for the book's structure. Then follows a detailed explication of the classical Greek myth of the Golden Fleece, including all its components: not just the theft of the Golden Fleece, but the exploits of Jason and the Argonauts, the ill-fated relationship of Jason and Medea, and the multiple Medea narratives. Tyminski's gifts as a writer are displayed early here: Although he sticks closely to traditional accounts, he deftly sets the stage to understand the characters as complex human beings. He has also chosen a strong mythological base to explore theft and loss. Classical sources found this myth cycle so compelling that multiple versions exist of many aspects of it. Jason is variously portrayed as cunning psychopath, brave hero, or puerile opportunistic dolt; Medea as murderous fiend, triumphant heroine, or woman wronged and scorned. These multiple and conflicting portrayals are echoed in more modern representations. People across the ages just cannot seem to leave this fecund and overheated material be.

Next, an array of psychological sources is mined to enrich understanding of this complex myth cycle. Freud, Jung, Klein, Bion, research from social and cognitive psychology, and many other sources are drawn into an eclectic yet cohesive brew that offers multiple ways of knowing these characters. Then, Tyminski introduces material from classics scholars to augment understandings of these characters. By the end of these four introductory chapters, readers have multifaceted and multidisciplinary perspectives on the main characters. One is reminded here of the first word used to describe Odysseus in the *Odyssey*: πολυτροπον; literally, a man of many turns, multifaceted, many-sided, but also perhaps chameleon-like, even *coyote* (trickster). Tyminski knows how to take readers on journeys of which they are not fully aware; very Jungian in both content and process.

Six chapters follow, each detailing a different aspect of theft: stealing by children, kidnapping, shoplifting, envy, technology-mediated theft, and patient theft from therapists. In each chapter Tyminski presents case studies, makes thoughtful use of the introductory base, and expands this latter with more sources. Tyminski has an extraordinary talent with case studies; his are among the most vibrant I have read, approaching real tenderness at times. Throughout, Tyminski layers complexity like an opera cake, exploring the relationships between theft and loss, the many meanings of theft, and others. Although clearly rooted in Jungian analytic psychology, his scope is broad, bringing in ideas from other theoretical schools, psychological research, other disciplines, and current events. His integration of these disparate sources is fluid and seamless. He is clearly comfortable with ambiguity and multiple concurrent perspectives, and gently eases readers into such an expansive *Weltanschauung*; not merely a worldview but a deep, broad, and seasoned worldview.

The book concludes with two chapters. One squarely anticipates a critique of this work: that theft is primarily socioeconomically driven. True to his eclectic style, Tyminski gives socioeconomic causation some due—but no more. The book concludes with a chapter exploring the internal thief in everyone and considering possible positive features of this in the overall psychological economy.

Tyminski's great skill with case studies is described above. It should be mentioned that coequal is his ability to render otherwise dense and obtuse ideas comprehensible, relevant, and at times vibrant. For example, his use of Bion's ideas on pages 174 to 175 turn Bion from a soporific to a stimulant for me. He is an elegant and accomplished writer; it was truly surprising to learn this is his first book, given how effortless he makes managing complex material seem.

On a critical note, I still do not understand how one uses this extraordinarily rich material clinically to effect actual change. This is a reaction I have to most analytic perspectives, both Freudian and Jungian. Ironically, the more I was delighted intellectually and affectively by Tyminski's tour de force, the stronger this reaction. I kept thinking that his volume makes the world a bit more of a richer, more human and spirited place; but how does it actually effect change in the lives of those who are hobbled by mental health problems?

It is a testament to the pleasure of reading Tyminski's work that I am happy to forgive him this, although I cannot see myself adopting these perspectives in the mechanics of clinical practice with patients. However, as I find his work of great value in understanding the clinical issues he raises, perhaps I am drawing an artificial distinction here. In the final analysis, I am left with a reaction similar to reading Lingardi; I am not quite sure what to make of it all, but I will be among the first to obtain whatever book Robert Tyminski authors next.

## References

---

- Hopcke, R., Carrington, K., & Wirth, S. (Eds.). (1993). *Same-sex love and the path to wholeness: Perspectives on gay and lesbian psychological development*. Boston, MA: Shambhala.
- Lingardi, V. (2002). *Men in love: Male homosexualities from Ganymede to Batman* (R. Hopcke, Trans.). Chicago, IL: Open Court Publishing. [PsycINFO →](#)