Robin Diver, "Entry on: The Moon Riders by Theresa Tomlinson ", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Lisa Maurice. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2019). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/823. Entry version as of April 26, 2024.

Theresa Tomlinson

The Moon Riders

United Kingdom (2002)

TAGS: Achilles Aethra Amazons Cassandra Chryseis Clytemnestra Hecuba Helen Iphigenia / Iphigeneia Odysseus / Ulysses Paris (Trojan Prince) Penthesilea Priam Theseus

We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	The Moon Riders
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	United Kingdom
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2002
First Edition Details	Theresa Tomlinson, *The Moon Riders*. London: Corgi Books, 2002, 338 pp.
ISBN	055254910-X
Genre	Fiction, Historical fiction, Mythological fiction
Target Audience	Young adults (although Amazon page claims 9–11 years)
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Creators

Theresa Tomlinson , b. 1946
(Author)

Theresa Tomlinson (b. Crawley, Sussex, 1946) is a British children's author, primarily of historical fiction. She attended Hull College of Art and Hull College of Education and has three children, as well as grandchildren. She initially came to writing novels through stories told to her children.

Tomlinson is the author of over twenty children's novels. Most of these are based on history and legend and many feature somewhat didactic stories about powerful women; for example, a trilogy about Maid Marian. The high amount of historical detail woven into her works is one of her distinguishing features as an author. She has also written novels about the early Anglo-Saxons.

Tomlinson cites her favourite children's novels as *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and *The Secret Garden,* also praising the work of Rosemary Sutcliff and Alan Garner. Her work receives much critical acclaim for its historical detail and Tomlinson has been shortlisted twice for the Carnegie Medal and the Sheffield Children's Book Award. US Publishers Weekly, however, complained of "a heavy-handed and somewhat self-righteous social agenda" in her Maid Marian novels.

Sources:

Back cover of book

Profile at wikipedia.org (accessed: March 28, 2019).

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Additional information

Sequels, Prequels and Spin-offs	*The Voyage of the Snake Lady* (2004)

Summary

This novel follows over a decade in the life of the Moon Riders, a group of warrior priestesses from various tribes who serve the moon goddess Maa and travel across Asia Minor. They are called “Amazons” by outsiders. In particular, the novel focuses on a young Mazagardi Moon Rider named Myrina, and her friendship with the Trojan princess Cassandra. Tomlinson looks at gender politics and freedom from the point of view of a protagonist from an egalitarian society. Told in third person, the novel is primarily from Myrina’s perspective, although it occasionally switches to that of other characters. The Moon Riders posses magic mirrors which show them what their loved ones are doing when not with them, allowing Myrina’s point of view to impart more information than would otherwise be possible.

The story begins with thirteen-year-old Myrina joining the Moon Riders and encountering the troubled Trojan princess Cassandra, who receives mystical visions and longs for the freedom of the Moon Riders. Myrina is ambivalent to Cassandra, but when the latter sneaks away to join the Moon Riders the two are pushed together often as new recruits and do become friends. This comes to an end when the Trojan War begins.

Cassandra learns that her other friend Iphigenia of Mycenae is in danger and she, Myrina and Penthesilea set out to rescue her, eventually learning she is going to be sacrificed by her father Agamemnon in order that he might sail to Troy. They successfully spirit Iphigenia away, replacing her with a dead doe. Cassandra, however, must now return to Troy.

Ten years pass and the brave but hot-headed Penthesilea now leads the Moon Riders. Myrina’s tribe and family are slain by Achilles’ Myrmidons, and Myrina takes responsibility for her young niece Yildiz, who has survived and is desperate for revenge. The Moon Riders agree to ride out against the Greeks to support their Trojan allies.

First Yildiz, then Penthesilea and most of the other Moon Riders are killed through their impatient obsession with revenge against Achilles and his men. Realising the Trojans cannot win and with Cassandra’s

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encouragement, Myrina leads an escape from Troy with the concubines of the Trojans, making these women the new Moon Riders to replace those killed. Myrina's husband Tomi, however, dies during this escape.

The novel ends with Clytemnestra killing Agamemnon to avenge the supposed death of her daughter Iphigenia. She is also about to kill Cassandra, but Cassandra reveals the truth about what happened to Iphigenia and Clytemnestra weeps and sets her free to sail away on a boat. Myrina, Iphigenia and Myrina's baby daughter Tamsin watch this through a magic mirror and are happy that Cassandra has at last found peace.

Analysis

The influence of feminist reception on this novel is apparent. Tomlinson discusses in author's notes how she was inspired by Lyn Webster Wilde's *On the Trail of the Women Warriors* (Constable and Co. Ltd., 1999), as well as by visits to Troy. There are also elements of woman-centred history and the great goddess theory, which was particularly popular towards the end of the twentieth century, in her work. Rather than using the "add women and stir" approach to compensatory history criticised by Strobel and Bingham (2004, p. 13), Tomlinson has retold an ancient legend that was already about women. She does not engage with the idea popular among goddess advocates of a lost historical golden age of matriarchy. Her protagonist is simply part of an egalitarian tribe surrounded by patriarchal societies. The semi-monotheistic goddess Maa worshipped by the Moon Riders, however, is certainly reminiscent of the goddess whom great goddess advocates claim was worshipped in the ancient world.

Tomlinson talks in her author's note about how she originally studied Latin in school but was struggling, and was relocated to Greek classes. She found the latter immensely enjoyable and inspiring, getting to study mythological texts in their original language. Certainly, *The Moon Riders* does have a fairly deep and nuanced engagement with its ancient source material, in addition to Tomlinson's usual attention to historical and geographical detail, which occupies a large amount of the novel. This is certainly historical fiction rather than a more fantasy-based retelling of a myth, in spite of the presence of prophecy and magic mirrors.

To some extent the central characters take a backseat to the mythology, scenery and detail. Compared to similar novels published

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around the same time such as A. Geras' *Troy* (2000) and C. Cooney's *Goddess of Yesterday* (2002), this novel is perhaps light on character development. Whilst a large number of the well-known mythical characters of the Trojan War appear, most are not developed in detail.

Myrina's love interest, Tomi, plays a relatively small role in the story. The two are childhood friends. Right before Myrina leaves to become a Moon Rider, he promises to wait for her and marry her when she returns, and the two kiss. Eventually, Tomi helps lead Trojan ally Memnon to Troy, and he and Myrina are married. Tomi supports Myrina in her scheme to free the Trojan slaves and is killed helping them escape; Myrina discovers she is pregnant later and gives birth to a daughter, Tamsin.

Rather a lot is made of the fact that the Moon Riders are not interested in conventional beautification. For example, when Myrina is presented with a magic mirror, she does not initially realise its magic nature. This leads her to protest that "I've never been one for sitting still admiring myself!" (p. 12.) When Myrina first encounters Cassandra, she senses of the princess that "dresses and adornment were of little interest to her" (pp. 19–20). Later, Myrina fears Tomi may not desire her anymore because she is not at her most attractive living under siege and battle, and Cassandra reminds her "When did Mazagardi look for a painted, delicate woman?" (p. 305). The novel thus implicitly establishes a dichotomy between strength and beautification.

Sexual slavery is a major theme of the novel. At the beginning, a version of the Theseus and the Amazons story is given in which Theseus kidnapped a woman named Antiope and the Moon Riders rode out to save her. However, Antiope ultimately chose to remain with Theseus, partly because she was pregnant with his child. Myrina cannot understand why Antiope made this decision.

Later, Myrina encounters Chryseis after she is returned to her father having been Agamemnon's concubine. Chryseis has entirely ceased to function and will not look at her baby son by Agamemnon. Eventually, Myrina convinces her that instead of seeing the baby as Agamemnon's child, she ought to view him as Iphigenia's sister. Chryseis is immediately roused by this and begins to care for him. (For a treatment of women as sexual slaves in the Trojan War in adult fiction see Barker's *The Silence of the Girls*, 2018. For a rather different portrayal of Chryseis positing she may have made the best of her situation and treated her position with Agamemnon as a genuine

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	relationship, see the anthology novel *A Song of Troy,* 2016.) The concubines of the Trojans, meanwhile, are shown to have found psychological ways to cope with their trauma through a strange form of moon worship, and are finally rescued by Myrina at the end.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Achilles Aethra Amazons Cassandra Chryseis Clytemnestra Hecuba Helen Iphigenia / Iphigeneia Odysseus / Ulysses Paris (Trojan Prince) Penthesilea Priam Theseus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Conflict Death Friendship Gender Gender, female History Prediction/prophecy Sexual abuse
Further Reading	Geras, Adèle, "Among the Amazons", *The Guardian* 8 Feb. (2003), available at Theguardian.com (accessed June 15, 2022). (*Troy* author Geras reviews *The Moon Riders*.)

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