Miriam Riverlea, "Entry on: Antigoddess (Goddess War, 1) by Kendare Blake ", peer-reviewed by Elizabeth Hale and Lisa Maurice. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2019). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/897. Entry version as of October 30, 2026.

Kendare Blake

Antigoddess (Goddess War, 1)

United States (2013)

TAGS: Andromache Aphrodite Apollo Athena Cassandra Circe Demeter Hector Hera Hermes Monsters Odysseus / Ulysses Odyssey Poseidon Trojan War Troy





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

General information	
Title of the work	Antigoddess (Goddess War, 1)
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	United States
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2013
First Edition Details	Kendare Blake, *Antigoddess*. New York: Tor Teen, 2013, 336 pp.
ISBN	9780765334435
Genre	Fantasy fiction, Horror fiction, Novels
Target Audience	Crossover
Author of the Entry	Miriam Riverlea, University of New England, mriverlea@gmail.com
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This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

Creators



Kendare Blake , b. 1981
(Author)

Kendare Blake is a writer of young adult short stories and novels in the genres of horror and fantasy. She was born in Seoul, South Korea, but grew up in Cambridge, Minnesota. She attended Ithaca College in New York and Middlesex College in London, from which she graduated with a Masters in Creative Writing. Her books include *Anna Dressed in Blood* (2011) and its sequel *Girl of Nightmares* (2012), the five books of the *Goddess Wars* series (2013–2015), and most recently, the *Three Dark Crowns* series.

Sources:

Official website (accessed: September 6, 2019).

Profile at Pan Macmillan (accessed: September 6, 2019).

Bio prepared by Miriam Riverlea, University of New England, mriverlea@gmail.com

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Additional information

Summary

Like several other recent novels for young adults, including Aimee Carter's *The Goddess Test* (2011) and Bree Despain's *Into the Dark* series, Kendare Blake's *Antigoddess* explores the premise that ancient gods have survived into the modern age. Ranging across both urban and natural landscapes of the United States, the novel is focalised through Athena, who is accompanied by her brother, Hermes. The pair resemble modern teenagers: Hermes wears jeans and a tight t-shirt, and Athena has tattoos and purple streaks in her hair. They look young, but it is revealed that the gods are dying, each in an appalling way that is specific to their mythology. Hermes, the god of swift movement, is wasting away, eaten up by an overactive metabolism. Athena is suffering a different fate, as the white feathers of her sacred animal, the owl, grow under her skin, "sprouting up inside her like a strange cancer" (p. 7). Ultimately, she fears, she will choke to death as the feathers fill her lungs.

In the desert of the Midwest, Athena and Hermes seek out Demeter. The goddess has been somehow stretched thin across miles of arid wasteland, and they walk across the taut surface of her skin in search of her mouth. She tells them that this is the Twilight of the Gods, and that other gods are preparing to fight a war in attempt to survive. There is little hope of victory against their formidable enemies, but she suggests that they find a prophetess, saying cryptically that if they make her remember, she will be much more. Leaving the goddess to her ghastly fate, Athena and Hermes move on.In a desert pub called the Watering Hole, Athena and Hermes narrowly escape from a pack of bloodthirsty Nereids, and deduce that Poseidon is their enemy, along with Hera and Aphrodite. They are searching for Achilles, the ultimate warrior, to join the fight.

Meanwhile, Cassandra Weaver is an ordinary teenager in Kincade, a fictional town in upstate New York. She has a boyfriend, Aidan Baxter, and hangs out at school with her brother Henry and friend Andie. While she can consistently predict the weather and accurately call a coin toss, Cassandra is unaware that she is in fact the reincarnation of Cassandra of Troy, and that Aidan is actually the god Apollo, secretly living among mortals.

In Chicago, Athena is reunited with her favourite hero Odysseus in the company of the witch Circe, who runs a high-class escort service.

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Badly wounded after being attacked by a Cyclops, he is being nursed by Circe's acolytes. Handsome and charismatic, Odysseus has a British accent, and has retained his wily cunning as well as his memory of his mythic past. He joins Athena and Hermes as they flee from Hera. Hera's arm has turned to stone, and she uses it to destroy Circe's coven, killing several of the witches inside. Though the media labels it a terrorist attack, Athena knows it is the work of their enemies.

Hermes locates Cassandra and exposes Apollo's true identity. Cassandra feels betrayed by her boyfriend, and initially cannot accept that their lives are in peril. When Athena arrives, Apollo fights her in an effort to make them leave him and Cassandra alone. Though she is horrifically wounded, Athena strangles Cassandra with her bare hands, and then brings her back to life. When she revives, Cassandra remembers her former identity, and that Henry is Hector, and Andie is Andromache. In an effort to protect their families, the teenagers flee from the gods, but Hera and her allies soon track them down. The final showdown takes place on an isolated forest road. Aidan is killed in the battle and Athena gravely injured, but Cassandra discovers that she has the power to harm the gods, and helps Athena to destroy both Hera and Poseidon. Aphrodite, who has gone insane, escapes into the forest. In the Epilogue, Cassandra and her friends attend Aidan's funeral, but Cassandra knows that her normal life is over, and that she will play an integral role in the ongoing war between the gods in the subsequent books in the trilogy.

Analysis

Antigoddess is a dark work of fantasy that is full of disturbing images, perhaps most vividly the owl feather that pushes its way through the roof of Athena's mouth until she brutally rips it out. It aims to titillate and unsettle young adult readers with a penchant for the grim and grisly. Readers are invited to identify with both Cassandra Weaver, whose surname seems to allude to the important role she is forced to play in saving the world, and Athena. The goddess is presented as a fallible, vulnerable figure who privately doubts her strength and courage, but is compelled to undertake desperate and violent acts in an effort to survive.

Blake repeatedly references the Trojan War saga but revises the traditional myth to imagine new Olympian alliances and rivalries. "Sides change all the time" Athena says (p. 50). The rationale for the

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conflict is not fully or satisfactorily explained; it seems that the gods are dying because mortals no longer worship them, but it is not entirely clear why some of the immortals are bent on destruction, and how killing other gods will save them. Athena and Hermes are cast as the only gods to have retained a conscience, while an environmental message seems to underpin the suffering of Poseidon, who is covered with ocean pollution, and Demeter, who is presented as an incarnation of Mother Earth. "I am used as the earth is used", she says. "Pulled thin across the land and consumed. Sucked dry, bleached white. And so I have been laid thin for decades. For centuries." (p. 30). The novel appears to be drawing a connection between the loss of belief in the gods and the excesses of modern life, but the scenes set in Kincade fail to demonstrate that the Olympian gods have any role within ordinary life.

Antigoddess explores the nature of immortality, and the way that living forever impacts upon one's moral compass. Apollo, who has chosen to live among mortals, seems to have been spared the degradation that his fellow Olympians are suffering, but he pays the price by dying a mortal death. It is clear that Aidan/Apollo feels tremendous guilt about his treatment of Cassandra, both at Troy and in the present, when he conceals his true identity from her. The themes of attraction, betrayal, and guilt are also at work in the depiction of the relationship between Athena and Odysseus. In spite of her status as a virgin goddess, Athena is deeply attracted to her favourite hero and Blake creates an atmosphere of sexual tension that seeks to titillate her readers.

While *Antigoddess* is not as successful in capturing the eccentric landscapes of the United States, the text recalls elements of Neil Gaiman's *American Gods* (2001), particularly in the depiction of Athena and Hermes holing up in a seedy motorway motel. The atmosphere of suspense, and elements of horror and graphic violence establish the book as a crossover text that requires readers to have a degree of maturity as well as a strong stomach. Like a number of her contemporary storytellers, Blake has fun with the act of recontextualising ancient gods and goddesses within a modern suburban setting. Though it provides some degree of closure, *Antigoddess* patently establishes an extended narrative arc that anticipates its sequels, *Mortal Gods* (2014) and *Ungodly* (2015).

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Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Andromache Aphrodite Apollo Athena Cassandra Circe Demeter Hector Hera Hermes Monsters Odysseus / Ulysses Odyssey Poseidon Trojan War Troy
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adversity Conflict Death Emotions Gaining understanding Journeys Life Memory Morality Peers
Further Reading	Tomasso, Vincent, "The Twilight of Olympus: Deicide and the End of the Greek Gods", in Monica Cyrino, and Meredith Safran, eds., *Classical Myth on Screen*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, 147–157. Maurice, Lisa, *Screening Divinity*, Edinbiurgh: EUP, 2019, 193–199.
Addenda	First book in the *Goddess War* Trilogy, followed by *Mortal Gods* (2014) and *Ungodly* (2015), and prequel novellas *When Gods and Vampires Roamed Miami* (2014) and *The Dogs of Athens* (2015).

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