



Women's Empowerment in Clarisse La Rue Character from Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson and the Sea of Monsters*

Putri Rahmawati¹, Seswita ^{*2}

^{1,2}Universitas Andalas, Padang, Indonesia

ARTICLE INFORMATION

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.25077/lingolitera.v2.i1.2026.23-27>
Correspondence :
seswita@hum.unand.ac.id

SUBMISSION TRACK

Submission : December 22, 2025
Final Review : January 19, 2026
Accepted : February 11, 2026
Available online : February 28, 2026

KEYWORDS

Women empowerment, character development, Clarisse La Rue, Rick Riordan, Greek mythology

ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the representation of women's empowerment through Clarisse La Rue in Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson: The Sea of Monsters*. The research focuses on the obstacles that hinder Clarisse from empowering herself and the character development she experiences throughout the Golden Fleece quest. Using Betty Friedan's theory of women empowerment from *The Feminine Mystique*, this study examines how Clarisse struggles with patriarchal expectations, external pressure, and the need for validation from her father, Ares. This research applies qualitative methods and library research to analyze the novel as the primary source. The findings reveal that Clarisse initially embodies aggressive and competitive traits shaped by patriarchal expectations, yet gradually develops self-awareness and emotional maturity. Through cooperation, vulnerability, and leadership, Clarisse transforms from a stubborn bully into a more empowered and self-aware character.

INTRODUCTION

Questions concerning the differences between gender and sex will persistently continue within our society, some individuals have even gone so far as to get into arguments about it. According to Anne Fausto Sterling, a prominent biologist and gender studies scholar, sex is a biological classification determined by human physical factors such as chromosomes, reproductive organs, and secondary sexual traits. As for gender, she acknowledges that it is a social and cultural construct that goes beyond biological differences (Fausto-Sterling, 1993).

Coming down from the topics above, this article primarily focuses on gender rather than sex. Specifically, gender stereotypes that will lead us to women empowerment issue as the gender stereotypes that we know mostly leave disadvantageous impacts for women. For the starter, in *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*, Lois Tyson discussed what exactly gender stereotypes is, stated that it is simply the idea where men are seen as the strong ones and women as the weak ones. Arising from that statement that reflected from our society's very own gender stereotypes, women are placed in unfavorable position which eventually lead us into women empowerment issue to make amends the situation for good.

According to Farah Mendlesohn, historically, fantasy literature has often upheld 'the mighty and well acknowledged' patriarchal norms by portraying women characters in limited and stereotypical roles where women are placed in secondary role (Mendlesohn, 2008).

Literature has long served as a reflection of social values, cultural beliefs, and power relations.

Among the many social issues represented in literary works, gender inequality remains one of the most significant. For centuries, women have frequently been portrayed as passive, dependent, and secondary to male characters. Such representations contribute to the reinforcement of patriarchal values that position women as inferior to men. Feminist literary criticism emerged as a response to these inequalities and seeks to examine how literature represents women and how literary texts can challenge gender-based oppression (Humm, 1992).

According to Humm (1992), feminism advocates equal social rights and opportunities for women and men. Similarly, (Montagu, 19) argues that many societies have historically regarded men as superior to women, creating unequal opportunities and expectations. These assumptions have influenced literature, where male characters are commonly depicted as heroes, leaders, and decision-makers, while women are often confined to domestic or supportive roles.

The development of feminist thought has significantly influenced contemporary literature. Modern authors increasingly create female characters who challenge traditional gender expectations and demonstrate leadership, independence, and strength. Such representations contribute to broader conversations regarding women's empowerment and identity formation.

One literary genre that has become particularly effective in exploring these issues is fantasy literature. Stated by Le Guin, Fantasy allows authors to create alternative worlds and social structures where conventional norms can be questioned and transformed. (Le Guin, 2009). Through imaginative narratives, fantasy literature provides opportunities for women characters to occupy positions of power and authority traditionally reserved for men.

Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson and the Sea of Monsters* (2006) offers an interesting example of women's empowerment through the character of Clarisse La Rue. Although the novel primarily focuses on Percy Jackson's heroic journey, Clarisse emerges as a significant figure whose experiences reflect empowerment, resilience, and self-discovery. As the daughter of Ares, the Greek God of War, Clarisse possesses exceptional combat abilities, courage, and leadership skills. However, despite her strengths, she faces numerous challenges that hinder her ability to recognize her own worth.

Previous studies on the *Percy Jackson* series have generally focused on Percy Jackson's heroism and character development. Kant (2023) argues that the series challenges traditional gender expectations through characters such as Annabeth Chase and Thalia Grace. Meanwhile, (Khoirida and Dewi) highlight how gender representation within the series often challenges conventional stereotypes. However, limited attention has been given specifically to Clarisse La Rue and her journey toward empowerment.

This study therefore seeks to answer two research questions. First, what obstacles hinder Clarisse La Rue from completing the Golden Fleece quest and empowering herself? Second, how does Clarisse La Rue's character development throughout the novel reflect women's empowerment? By applying Betty Friedan's theory of women's empowerment, this research aims to demonstrate how Clarisse's journey represents a struggle for identity, self-awareness, and independence.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research method combined with library research. Based on what stated by (Djamba and Neuman), qualitative research focuses on analyzing textual data and interpreting meanings rather than producing numerical findings (Neuman, 2000). Since the objective of this study is to examine character development and empowerment within a literary text, qualitative analysis is considered the most appropriate method.

The primary source of data is Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson and the Sea of Monsters* (2006). Secondary sources include books, journal articles, theses, and scholarly studies related to feminism, fantasy literature, and women's empowerment.

Data collection was conducted through close reading of the novel. Relevant passages, dialogues, character descriptions, and narrative events involving Clarisse La Rue were identified and categorized according to the research objectives. The collected data were then analyzed using Betty Friedan's theory of women's empowerment.

Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) argues that many women become trapped in externally imposed identities and expectations. Empowerment begins when women develop self-awareness and

pursue identities based on personal fulfillment rather than societal demands. This theoretical perspective provides an effective framework for understanding Clarisse La Rue's development throughout the novel.

Through *The Feminine Mystique*, Friedan promotes women empowerment by challenging the gender roles given by the society, she helped the women to voice their own desire and to be aware of their own fulfillment. This book emphasizes that empowerment begins with awareness of one's desires, potential, and identity. To be empowered, women first needed to recognize themselves, discover their own desires in life and name the problem they faced.

Friedan links the 'problem' to issues of life and identity. For many women, their lives were defined by external expectations rather than by their own desires. These women were trapped in a cycle of living for others, and while doing so, they lost their own identities. Friedan argued that by living this 'ideal life', women were sacrificing their personal fulfillment and identity.

Women's empowerment, according to Friedan, requires women to take control of their identities and lives, rather than allowing external expectations to define them. In this context, self-awareness was the first step toward empowerment, encouraging women to take action toward finding fulfillment and personal identities that did not depend on fulfilling external expectations. Empowerment relies on women understanding of their own needs and desires while being able to act upon them.

By analyzing Clarisse La Rue's character through the lens of Friedan's theory of women empowerment, you can see how her portrayal in *The Sea of Monsters* strongly reflects a figure that lives out the women empowerment that Betty Friedan advocated *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). Clarisse La Rue's role as a powerful and independent women character challenges the restrictive norms and stereotypes often found in fantasy literature, but still Clarisse La Rue struggles with several obstacles that holding her back from empowering herself. Through her actions and journey in *Percy Jackson and the Sea of Monsters*, Clarisse La Rue represents how empowerment Friedan envisioned for women in the 1960s and beyond.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Obstacles That Hinder Clarisse La Rue's Empowerment

Interference from Half-Blood Campers

One of the primary obstacles Clarisse faces is the constant interference and skepticism of her fellow campers. Despite demonstrating exceptional leadership and bravery, Clarisse is frequently underestimated. Early in the novel, she successfully confronts one of the Colchis Bulls while many campers retreat in fear (Riordan, 2006).

Clarisse's ability to lead under pressure demonstrates competence and courage. However, her achievements are often overshadowed by her identity as "Ares' daughter" rather than recognized as personal accomplishments. This point out women empowerment issue that Betty Friedan dan has mentioned in *The Feminine Mystique*, "the problem that has no name... is a problem of life and identity." (Friedan, 1963). Friedan (1963) argues that empowerment requires individuals to be valued for their own identities rather than through external associations. In Clarisse's case, this recognition remains difficult to achieve. Clearly, being recognized as Ares' daughter rather than a brave warrior with all of her strength and abilities is one of the biggest obstacles that holding Clarisse La Rue back from empowering herself.

The selection of Clarisse for the Golden Fleece quest further demonstrates her capability. Tantalus chooses her because she has proven herself resourceful and courageous. Nevertheless, Percy Jackson and others question this decision, creating additional pressure. Rather than receiving support, Clarisse must continually justify her qualifications.

The Burden of the Oracle's Prophecy

Another obstacle emerges through the prophecy delivered by the Oracle of Delphi. The prophecy creates uncertainty and anxiety regarding the success of her mission. Instead of interpreting the prophecy as guidance, Clarisse perceives it as a warning that she must complete the quest entirely on her own.

This misunderstanding reflects a limitation in Clarisse's self-awareness. Friedan (1963) emphasizes that empowerment involves recognizing one's own needs and accepting support when necessary. However, Clarisse initially interprets independence as complete isolation. As a result, she experiences unnecessary emotional pressure throughout the journey.

Her misinterpretation also reflects the broader social expectation that strong women must succeed without assistance. Such expectations often prevent women from seeking collaboration and support, ultimately hindering personal growth.

Patriarchal Expectations from Ares

The most significant obstacle faced by Clarisse is the pressure imposed by her father, Ares. Throughout the novel, Ares exerts psychological control over Clarisse and demands absolute success. During their interaction aboard the battleship, Ares belittles Clarisse, threatens her with failure, and suggests that one of his sons might have been a better choice for the quest (Riordan, 2006).

This interaction illustrates patriarchal authority in its most explicit form. Ares establishes unrealistic expectations while simultaneously undermining Clarisse's confidence. His behavior reflects the societal pressures described by Friedan (1963), where women are often expected to conform to roles defined by male authority figures.

Clarisse's desire to gain her father's approval becomes a central motivation for her actions. Rather than pursuing the quest for personal fulfillment, she initially seeks validation from Ares. This dependence prevents her from fully recognizing her own worth and capabilities.

Clarisse La Rue's Character Development

From Aggression to Self-Awareness

At the beginning of the novel, Clarisse is portrayed as aggressive, arrogant, and intimidating. Percy Jackson frequently describes her as a bully, and her actions reflect many of the characteristics associated with her father, Ares. As what Percy Jackson conferred "she was one of the biggest bullies at camp"(37).

In addition to that, Percy Jackson also shares his experience on meeting Clarisse La Rue for the first time. "The first time we'd met she tried to introduce my head to a toilet"(37). This confession from Percy Jackson reveals how Clarisse La Rue inherited her father's aggressive and obnoxious behavior, evident in how she intimidate and harassing other campers even on their first meeting. Clarisse La Rue embodies the typical trait of the God of War himself who enjoys asserting dominance over other people.

However, these traits do not represent Clarisse's authentic identity. Instead, they reflect years of pressure to embody Ares' ideals of strength and dominance. Her behavior can be interpreted as a coping mechanism developed in response to patriarchal expectations.

Throughout the Golden Fleece quest, Clarisse begins to question these assumptions. She encounters situations that require cooperation rather than aggression. Gradually, she learns that leadership involves trust, communication, and emotional resilience rather than intimidation alone.

Learning Cooperation and Vulnerability

A significant aspect of Clarisse's growth is her increasing willingness to cooperate with others. Initially, she views assistance as a sign of weakness. One thing about Clarisse La Rue is she never thought that she would need other people's help, let alone asking for one. Clarisse La Rue is known for her bravery and the insane battling skills that she has, for that reason a lot of campers are relying on her. However, the challenges of the quest force her to rely on allies, including Percy Jackson.

This transformation aligns closely with Friedan's theory of empowerment. According to Friedan (1963), empowerment requires self-awareness and the freedom to define oneself beyond imposed expectations. By accepting help, Clarisse rejects the rigid model of strength promoted by Ares.

Her willingness to collaborate demonstrates emotional maturity. She begins to understand that independence does not require isolation and that vulnerability can coexist with strength.

Reclaiming Identity

The biggest issue within Clarisse La Rue's character that catches the writer's concern to conduct this research is Clarisse La Rue's identity crisis. Clarisse La Rue has been living her whole life in pursuit of her father's expectation on her. The most important aspect of Clarisse's development is her gradual separation from her father's influence. While she continues to value courage and determination, she no longer defines herself solely according to Ares' expectations.

This shift represents the essence of empowerment. Friedan (1963) argues that women must move beyond externally imposed identities in order to achieve fulfillment. Clarisse's journey reflects this process as she transitions from seeking validation to developing self-recognition.

By the conclusion of the novel, Clarisse remains a powerful warrior, but her strength is no longer dependent on her father's approval. Instead, she begins to establish her own identity based on personal experiences and values.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Clarisse La Rue's character in *Percy Jackson and the Sea of Monsters* serves as a powerful representation of women's empowerment. Despite possessing exceptional abilities, Clarisse faces numerous obstacles that hinder her self-empowerment, including skepticism from fellow campers, the burden of the Oracle's prophecy, and patriarchal expectations imposed by her father, Ares.

Among these obstacles, the pressure from Ares emerges as the most significant because it shapes Clarisse's understanding of herself and her worth. Her constant pursuit of approval prevents her from fully recognizing her own abilities and identity.

Throughout the Golden Fleece quest, Clarisse undergoes substantial character development. She learns the value of cooperation, embraces emotional vulnerability, and gradually separates her self-worth from external validation. Her transformation reflects Betty Friedan's concept of empowerment as a process of self-awareness and identity formation.

Ultimately, Clarisse La Rue challenges traditional gender stereotypes by demonstrating that women can possess leadership, courage, and authority while maintaining individuality and emotional depth. Her journey illustrates how fantasy literature can function as a powerful medium for promoting women's empowerment and encouraging readers to question restrictive gender expectations.

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