

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1. Background Of The Research

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. In terms of definition, distinguishing between both terms is actually rather easy. 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). According to both interpretations, sex is as simple as men and women determined solely on physical characteristics that we can see with bare eyes. Gender, on the other hand, is a lot more than simply physical characteristics; gender is traits that are generated by society's perspective.

Coming down from the topics above, this thesis 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. Both terms not only popular in real life society, they also spread to other fields, even the magnificent world of literature could not leave them behind.

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). A lot of literature has the kind of stories about poor women who are saved by men and similar scenarios. The classic tales of princesses and their heroic prince charming are the kind of literary works that everyone ever heard of or read to in their childhood era. Since we were a kid, we have been exposed to scenarios where men are portrayed as the superior gender and every kind of problems can only be solved by men. However, feminist literary theorist argues that fantasy literature can also be a medium for us to break free from those scenarios and empower ourselves as women.

Fantasy literature, with its expansive and imaginative worlds, offers a boundless platform as a medium for human to rescript social issues, including gender stereotype and empowerment. As stated in an essay by Ursula Kroeber Le Guin, an American author, the society and social issues does not have to be the way it is as it is in real life, that has to be the way how the fantasy says (Le Guin, 2009). It is a reminder that in fantasy literature, the world does not have to be in the same shape as in real life, fantasy literature offers the platform to reshape the world. In Elaine Showalter’s *A Literature of Their Own*, it is asserted that in recent years, feminist literary scholars have been directing their attention on to narratives that have the potential to challenge the existed gender stereotypes (Showalter, 1999). Through those narratives, fantasy literature provides not only a safe place for

women to escape the reality but also a critical space where every woman has the rights to redefine the stereotypes in order to empower themselves.

As feminist scholar Jessica Langer states, fantasy provides an important platform for feminist authors to look into and criticize gender roles. By developing scenarios where women go beyond traditional standards, fantasy literature not only entertains but also encourages readers to picture alternate realities. (Langer, 2012). This statement highlights the capability of fantasy to both challenge and broaden the limits of gender stereotypes within society as fantasy can be served as powerful medium to support and inspire women to empower themselves.

Similarly, Marlene Barr highlights this potential with a statement, “The feminist fantasy genre reconfigures gender dynamics through imaginative storytelling, allowing women characters to transcend conventional limitations and exercise agency in ways that reflect broader feminist ideals” (Barr, 2008). Barr’s statement emphasizes how fantasy narratives can redefine women roles offering new methods of understanding the women empowerment issue.

A large number of literary works carry the values of women empowerment, whether overtly or implicitly. Among the authors who take steps to embrace the issue through their characters is Rick Riordan, the #1 New York Times bestselling novelist who has twenty books for young readers, including the *Percy Jackson* series.

As a series of fantasy novels set in modern times, *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* features the Greek Gods and goddesses and their offspring. Centred on the adventures of Percy Jackson the Demigod (half human, half Greekgod) and his sidekicks. The second book in this series, *Percy Jackson and the Sea of Monsters*, is used as research material in this thesis.

*Percy Jackson and the Sea of Monsters* highlights the adventure of Percy Jackson when he forced his way in a Golden Fleece quest of saving the Half-blood camp. As a note, this quest is assigned to Clarisse La Rue. Percy Jackson returned to Half-Blood camp for the summer break to find it under attack. To save the camp, Clarisse La Rue and Percy Jackson, along with his friend Annabeth Chase and his half-brother Tyson (a Cyclops), embarked on a journey to the Sea of Monsters to retrieve the Golden Fleece and prevent the revival of the Titan lord Kronos.

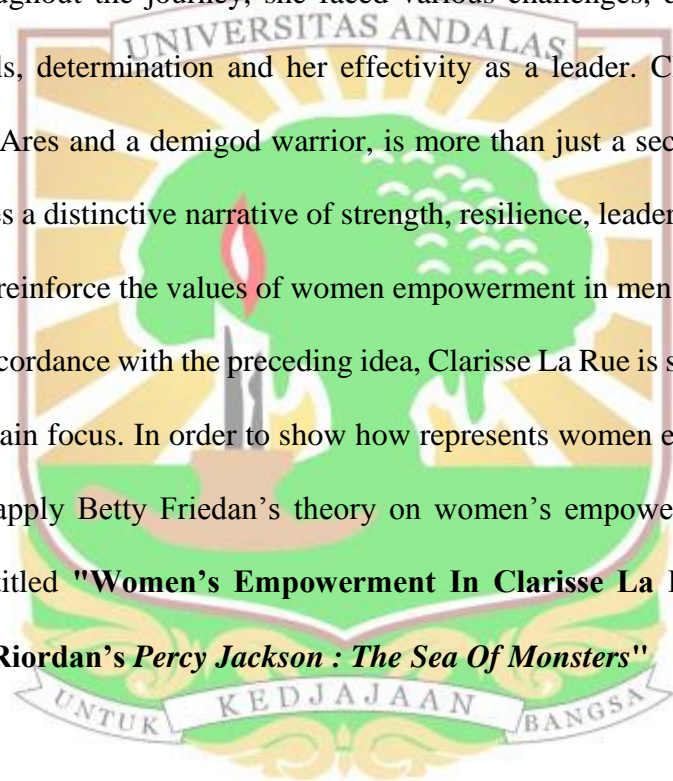
Aside from personal reasons such as how this novel is one of the writer's favourite novels, the way the writer likes Greek mythology, and Clarisse La Rue is her favourite character in this novel, there are also additional reasons why the writer picked this work of literature for its representation of women empowerment. *Percy Jackson: Sea of Monsters* provides an intriguing and various context for exploring themes of women's empowerment within contemporary fantasy literature due to its complex portrayal of women characters, subversion of traditional gender roles, emphasis on solidarity and leadership, and influence on young audiences. Through a detailed examination of these elements, this research will demonstrate how fantasy literature not only reflects but actively participates in feminist discourse, offering readers both a critique of existing gender norms and a vision of a more equitable and empowering world. By engaging with these texts, the thesis will highlight the ways in which fantasy literature can challenge traditional gender stereotypes and contribute to the broader conversation about women's rights and empowerment.

Most studies that use this novel as the object of research focus on the concept and theory of hero's journey of the title character, Percy Jackson, along with his sidekicks. Whereas, the writer of this research is focusing on neither Percy Jackson



himself as the title character and the narrator nor Annabeth Chase Chase as one of the main protagonists of the novel. In contrast, this thesis focuses on Percy Jackson's rival who happens to be his bully, Clarisse La Rue. She is the daughter of Ares the Greek God of war and that makes her a Demigod. In *Sea of Monsters*, Clarisse La Rue stands out as a convincing figure whose journey embodies the values of women empowerment within a mythological framework. She is the one whom is originally commanded to do the Golden Fleece retrieval quest in order to save Half-Blood camp. Throughout the journey, she faced various challenges, demonstrating her combat skills, determination and her effectivity as a leader. Clarisse La Rue, a daughter of Ares and a demigod warrior, is more than just a secondary character, she embodies a distinctive narrative of strength, resilience, leadership and personal growth that reinforce the values of women empowerment in men field.

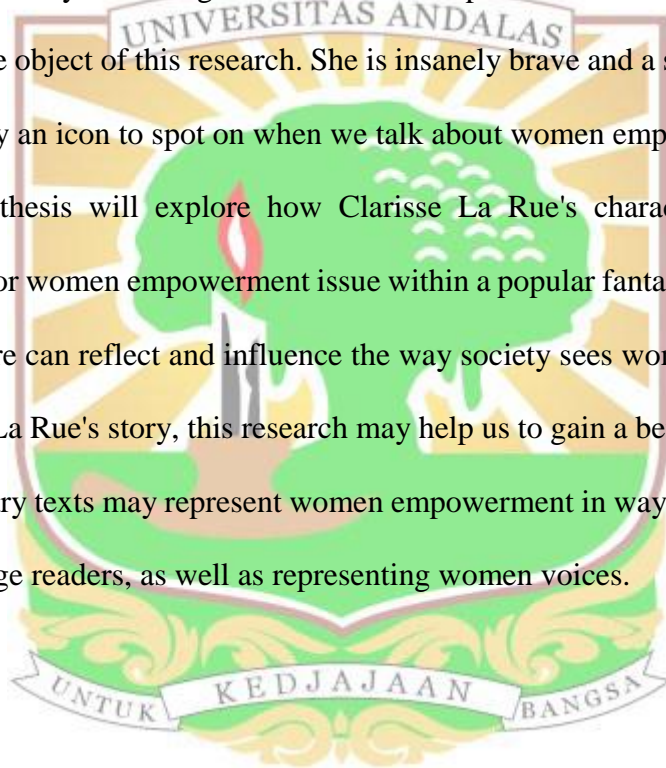
In accordance with the preceding idea, Clarisse La Rue is selected as the this research's main focus. In order to show how represents women empowerment, the writer will apply Betty Friedan's theory on women's empowerment. Thus, this thesis is entitled **"Women's Empowerment In Clarisse La Rue's Character from Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson : The Sea Of Monsters*"**



## 1.2. Identification of the Problem

*Percy Jackson and the Sea of Monsters* presents the story of how the Demigods are doing the best that they can to save their camp. It goes without saying that the journey is not smooth as silk sheets; there are many battles and survival scenarios. The journey that calls for courage, determination, and combat ability. Instead of following the story through Percy Jackson's journey as the title character, this thesis prefers Clarisse La Rue's journey. Clarisse's image as a warrior who nailed the journey of saving the halfblood camp is the main reason why she is chosen as the object of this research. She is insanely brave and a skilled leader. She is undeniably an icon to spot on when we talk about women empowerment..

The thesis will explore how Clarisse La Rue's character serves as an instrument for women empowerment issue within a popular fantasy series, showing how literature can reflect and influence the way society sees women . By focusing on Clarisse La Rue's story, this research may help us to gain a better understanding of how literary texts may represent women empowerment in ways that engage with and encourage readers, as well as representing women voices.



### 1.3. Review of Related Studies

Aside of picking lines from Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson and the Sea of Monsters* novel as the primary source of this research, this research also uses few researches related to the topic of gender stereotypes as comparison to different views and opinions on analyzing the work or the gender stereotypes itself.

Few studies have been done on gender issues using *Percy Jackson and the Sea of Monsters*, hardly concentrating on Clarisse La Rue. However, the author of this study has gathered several research studies that contribute to a deeper understanding of women empowerment or issues related to the selected novel.

The closest research using the same material and related topic is an article "*Percy Jackson: Defying Toxic Expectations and Gender Roles for Years*" (Kant, 2023), the author explores how Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson* series, including the *Percy Jackson and the Sea of Monsters*, challenges traditional gender norms through its characters. In the findings, Kant highlights how both male and female characters defy stereotypes such as Percy is emotional and empathetic without losing his strength, while female characters like Annabeth and Thalia are intelligent, strategic, and powerful without being "overly masculine." While Kant's article offers an analysis of women empowerment through Annabeth and Thalia, this research is a close character study of Clarisse La Rue. Unlike Annabeth or Thalia, Clarisse begins the story shaped by patriarchal control, particularly her father Ares' violent and rigid expectations. This research dives deeper into how Clarisse's journey is about reclaiming her identity as a woman who chooses her own path, not one dictated by her father.

Next is a research conducted by Aina Khoirida and Haru Deliana Dewi in article entitled 'Gender Representation of *Percy Jackson & The Lightning Thief* in

English and Indonesian'. The aim of this research is to analyze and compare the gender representation of *Percy Jackson & The Lightning Thief* between English and Indonesian versions. The materials are collected from *Percy Jackson & The Lightning Thief* which is the prequel of *Percy Jackson And The Sea Of Monsters*. Just like what is written in the title, the target of this research the representation of gender in original language of the novel and the translated one. The finding of this research shows the imbalanced ration of gender representation as male characters outnumbering female characters in both versions of the novel. Somehow, some female and male characters are represented by challenging the traditional gender stereotypes. This leads to the conclusion that Rick Riordan's characters are challenging gender stereotypes and somewhat empowering for women, which validates the writer of this thesis to analyze one of the books to find better representation of women empowerment through one specific character, and the selected character is Clarisse La Rue.

The second study is an article written by Ria Yuliasari and Rika Virtianti. As stated in introduction of the study, most studies ever conducted using *Percy Jackson: Sea of Monsters* focus on the title character with the use of heroism theory, this journal is an example. A journal entitled "Types of Heroism of the Main Character and the Cause of Emergence of Heroism in the movie *Percy Jackson and the Sea of Monsters*." aims to describe the heroic traits of Percy Jackson himself and the cause of heroism's emergences in *Percy Jackson and the Sea of Monsters movie* such as the personal values, external challenges, relationships and sense of duty. Not only this journal points out the heroic traits in Percy Jackson but also touches the gender stereotypes implicitly because the bravery, selflessness, leadership, integrity, resourcefulness, compassion, determination, and willingness



to sacrifice that Percy Jackson has are stereotypically men traits. By comparing these traits to the ones that Clarisse La Rue has, the writer of this thesis gains a deeper understanding of gender stereotypes through the lens of heroism.

Next is a thesis discusses Circe, the daughter of Helios the Greek God of Sun, who becomes the symbol of women's strength. In her thesis "In the Witch's Defence: Female Agency in Madeline Miller's *Circe*", Alifia Taati Ikhvan talks about how Circe's journey is about women finding their voice and breaking free from male control. Even though their stories are different, both *Circe* and Clarisse show how women in fantasy can grow stronger in their own way. Ikhvan's thesis helps support this research by showing how fantasy stories can give women characters the power to change, make their own choices, and rewrite the roles they were given. This research adds to this by showing how Clarisse's growth is not just personal, but also a message about women's empowerment, not just fixing past mistakes, but learning to define your own strength and identity. The difference between Ikhvan's thesis and this research is the theory and setting of the story, Ikhvan's thesis uses Patriarchy (1990) and Simone de Beauvoir's theory of Feminist Existentialism while this research uses Women Empowerment theory by Betty Friedan.

The last related study is an article "Gender Stereotypes By Presenting A Women Protagonist Portrayed In The Neil Burger's *Divergent* (2014)" by Rahayasa Maheswara and Yeni Prastiwi. Their research's material is different with the rest of the studies that have been reviewed. Their research uses *Divergent* film as the material and focus on the women main character who is also the narrator of the story. Using the same approach as this research, feminist approach, their research finds that *Divergent* challenges the gender stereotypes through its main protagonist,

Beatrice "Tris" Prior, who oppose the societal expectations towards women. The findings show that Tris develops the traits that are stereotypically known as the representation of men traits, Tris is portrayed as a soldier who is packed with physical strength, leadership abilities and independence. The findings help the writer of this thesis by conducting comparative analyses to deepen understanding of gender stereotypes implications and how they are challenged through Tris' character.

The previous studies give huge contribution to this research in different ways. Starts with the one written by Keshav Kant entitled "Percy Jackson: Defying Toxic Expectations and Gender Roles for Years" that talks about the same topic and uses the same novel as this research, next is the one written by Aina Khoirida and Haru Deliana Dewi entitled 'Gender Representation of *Percy Jackson & The Lightning Thief* in English and Indonesian', this research shares the same material of this essay which is the book from the same series from Rick Riordan and touch the same field of gender stereotypes and empowerment but uses different characters to be analyzed. A thesis entitled *In the Witch's Defence: Female Agency in Madeline Miller's Circe*" by Alifia Taati Ikhvan is in the same topic of women empowerment but the source is different novel and character, even though both share the red line of Greek Mythology. A journal by Ria Yuliasari and Rika Virtianti entitled "Types of Heroism of the Main Character and the Cause of Emergence of Heroism in the movie *Percy Jackson and the Sea of Monsters*." also uses the same material yet their research has nothing to do with any feminism or gender studies let alone focusing on Clarisse La Rue because its focus is on heroism issues on Percy Jackson himself as the title character. The last two studies use different materials, "In the Witch's Defence: Female Agency in Madeline Miller's *Circe*" by

Alifia Taati Ikhvan aims to point out Circe asserts her agency by working through her magic, embracing intellectualism through her continuous learning of her magical prowess, striving for a social transformation by protecting her son, and rejecting the role of the “other” imposed by the gods and accepts herself as the object while the last study presenting the issue of gender stereotypes through the main character *Divergent*.

#### 1.4. Research Questions

The point of this research is limited to answer these questions :

1. What are the obstacles that hinders Clarisse La Rue from completing the quest and empowering herself in *Percy Jackson and the Sea of Monsters*?
2. How does Clarisse La Rue’s character development throughout *Percy Jackson and the Sea of Monsters* reflect the theme of women empowerment?

#### 1.5. Scope of the Research

This research will focus on exploring the theme of women's empowerment as it is reflected in the character of Clarisse La Rue from *Percy Jackson and the Sea of Monsters*. The study will dig into Clarisse La Rue’s obstacles in empowering herself and her character development throughout the novel. By analyzing Clarisse La Rue’s character this research will uncover how her journey represents the theme of women empowerment.

This research will focus specifically on *Percy Jackson and the Sea of Monsters*, limiting the scope to the representation of Clarisse La Rue within the second book of the series. It will not extend to other characters or plots from later books in the *Percy*

*Jackson* series. Additionally, while the focus will be on feminist themes and women's empowerment, the research will not explore deeper into the mythological aspects of other characters from Greek mythology, unless directly relevant to the discussion of Clarisse La Rue's women empowerment and character development.

### **1.6. Objective of the Research**

The research will analyze how Clarisse La Rue's internal conflict—driven by her father's expectations—reflects the women empowerment issue, particularly in terms of fulfilling expectations. This objective of the research aims to highlight how these pressures conflict with her personal journey toward self-empowerment. The objective will also focus on examining Clarisse La Rue's growth throughout *Percy Jackson and the Sea of Monsters* in terms of women's empowerment. It will analyze key moments in the narrative that reflect her shift from seeking external validation (from her father and others) to realizing her personal worth and identity, breaking her free from the external expectations. The research will be discussed by getting insights from Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*. The objective is to link Clarisse La Rue's character growth and her journey with larger ideas of women empowerment.

This research has another goal which is being such a helpful reference for those who love the *Percy Jackson Series* and willing to understand Clarisse La Rue better. Hopefully, this research can be helpful too for the ones who find their interest in women empowerment and related studies.