

Comparative Literature Study of *Little Women* Movie in American Version and Korean Version

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Abstract

This research aims to analyze : (1) the temperament of the characters in the American and Korean versions of the film Little Women, (2) the comparison of human temperaments in the American and Korean versions of the film Little Women. The study uses a descriptive qualitative method to analyze the objective of the research, which is Little Women (2019) American movie directed by Greta Gerwig, and Little Women (2022) Korean drama directed by Kim Hee Won. The researcher analyzes the data by using a Comparative Literature Study with the Human Temperament theory by Immanuel Kant. The result of the study : (1) the characters' temperament of soul presented in the Little Women (2019) movie and Little Women (2022) Korean drama is Choleric Temperament in characters Jo March and Oh In-Kyung, Phlegmatic Temperament in the character Meg March and Oh In-Hye, Melancholic Temperament in character Beth March and Oh In-Joo, and Sanguinis Temperament in character Amy March; (2) the comparison of the characters' temperament of the Korean drama Little Women (2022) is inversely proportional to the characters' temperament of the film Little Women (2019). This is mainly due to the very different backgrounds in both. The film Little Women (2019) is set in the 1980s, whereas the Korean drama Little Women (2022) is set in the present age. With such different socio-cultural conditions, the depiction of the human temperament in the scenes is very different.

Keywords: American women, South Korean women, temperament human

Introduction

Women, in a psychological or gender context, are often defined by traits considered feminine, leading to societal stereotypes of women as weak, soft, needing affection, and dependent on men. These stereotypes have historically resulted in men being seen as having greater roles in social life, including greater freedom in education, work, and marriage. This creates a significant disparity between the choices available to men and women. However, societal views on women have progressed, as evidenced by events like the second International Women Leadership and Women Empowerment Conference in 2017, which aimed

to support women's empowerment in all sectors. The United Nations Human Rights also highlighted the ongoing fight for women's rights to equality and freedom in their lives.

Despite the advancements, women's rights have not yet been fully achieved. The media has increasingly covered issues related to women's rights, portraying how culture and society offer women more opportunities to make choices. Films, as a form of social phenomenon, provide multiple interpretations and can serve as platforms for addressing societal issues, including gender equality, humanity, and feminism. Greta Gerwig's *Little Women* (2019) and the South Korean drama series *Little Women* (2022), directed by Kim Hee Won, both depict women's roles and choices in different cultural contexts. The American film portrays the March family's four daughters navigating post-war America, while the Korean drama follows three sisters entangled with a powerful family, highlighting their bravery in protecting their family and seeking the truth.

Literary Review

Comparative Literature Study

Comparative literature is the study of two or more literary works in comparison. Comparative literature studies several aspects of literary works, including historical, gender, economic, cultural, social, philosophical, theological, and linguistic issues from the different cultures under consideration.

Defined most broadly, comparative literature is the study of literature without borders. Francois Jost explained that “*Comparative literature needs to discuss works that have universal qualities so that they can be positioned as citizens of world literature*” (Jost, 1974: 178). In the context of comparative literary theory, this is not considered a problem because universal literature is also very relative.

Human Temperament

Temperament is innate and this is what shapes humans. Considered psychologically, which defined the terms borrowed from the blood constitution will be introduced only by the analogy of the play of feelings and desires with the body (Kant, 2006: 190). Temperament is a combination of traits and

characteristics in a person that influence their thoughts, actions, and emotions (Buss & Plomin, 1984: 35).

The temperament is classified based on several personality traits that appear to constitute their fundamental temperament. Some people have a quick temper, while others are more relaxed. Hippocrates identified four varieties of temperament: sanguine, choleric, melancholic, and phlegmatic (Kant, 2006: 195).

1. Choleric Temperament

Choleric people are ambitious people and leaders. A person with the choleric type is someone who wants to always excel physically and academically, likes change, and is willing to correct mistakes. Choleric people also have a high sense of responsibility in carrying out their duties (Dunning & Donna, 2008). Choleric temperament are the type of people who feel satisfied with themselves and do not need to depend on other people, are firm and far-sighted, easily make decisions, both for themselves and others (Littauer, 2008).

2. Phlegmatic Temperament

A phlegmatic is someone humble, sociable, relaxed, quiet, calm, and able to hide emotions. People with the phlegmatic type tend to be pessimistic and look for easy responsibilities in carrying out their duties (Dunning & Donna, 2008). Phlegmatic persons are docile, cautious, controlled, calm, cool, serene, and stable. Phlegmatic individuals are quiet, wise, reflective, courteous, and trustworthy. They are not readily insulted or provoked to rage, yet they dislike excessive speaking. They are devoted, committed, tolerant, and supportive.

3. Sanguine Temperament

Sanguine is the type of person who is active, full of enthusiasm, creative and innovative, optimistic and sociable. Sanguine people also like new tasks periodically and like all activities that require more energy. People with this type are people who have an optimistic character and are often called people who have abundant blood (Littauer, 2008). The most prominent characteristic of people with the Sanguine temperament type is that they easily interact with other people and enjoy conveying messages to other people (Suryabrata, 2007).

4. Melancholic Temperament

A Melancholic is someone whose life is very close to the surrounding environment. They prefer to work and play alone and have difficulty making new acquaintances, preferring only a few close friends. They do not volunteer to meet people but tend to let people come to them. They are also serious, analytical, thoughtful, and quiet types. They are classified as geniuses, highly ambitious, and perfectionists (Dunning & Donna, 2008).

American and South Korean Women's Condition

American Women's Condition

In the classical era from the late 18th to early 19th century, American women had limited legal rights and were predominantly engaged in domestic roles within an agrarian society transitioning to early industrialization. Under the doctrine of coverture, married women could not own property, sign contracts, or control their earnings, and their education focused on basic literacy and domestic skills, reinforcing the "cult of domesticity" that kept them away from public and political life. Early advocates for education and reform began paving the way for future advancements.

Today, American women have made significant strides in education, with higher college degree attainment and participation in graduate programs and traditionally male-dominated professions. Political representation has improved, though women remain underrepresented. Despite these advancements, challenges such as domestic violence, sexual harassment, career-family balance, and underrepresentation in high-paying fields persist. Critical policies like paid family leave and affordable childcare are not universally available, and traditional gender norms still influence women's experiences. Ongoing efforts are needed to address these persistent inequalities and ensure comprehensive rights and opportunities for all women.

South Korean Women's Condition

During the classical era under the Joseon Dynasty, South Korean women faced highly restrictive conditions influenced by Neo-Confucianism, emphasizing obedience to male figures, limited public roles, and adherence to the "Three Obediences." Women were expected to manage households and uphold moral

conduct, with diminished legal rights over time, and divorce and remarriage were heavily stigmatized. In contrast, modern South Korean women have made substantial progress in education, employment, and social rights, often surpassing men in university enrollment and graduation rates, and increasing their participation in diverse professional fields.

Despite these advancements, challenges persist, including workplace discrimination, traditional gender role expectations, domestic violence, and sexual harassment. Political representation has improved, yet women remain underrepresented in high-level roles. Balancing career and family life remains difficult, influenced by traditional Confucian values, although younger generations are pushing for greater gender equality. While legal rights for women have improved, societal attitudes and implementation still lag. Overall, South Korean women have made significant strides, but ongoing efforts are necessary to achieve true gender equality, address wage disparities, and shift societal norms.

Research Methodology

This research is under the descriptive qualitative method. The descriptive qualitative method is used to “*Provide detailed descriptions and analysis of the quality, or the substance, of the human experience*” (Marvasti, 2014: 13). The object of this research is a film under the title *Little Women* in American and Korean versions.

The types of data that are used are main data which is collected from the dialogue’s film, and supporting data which is collected from some sources, like books, the internet, and journals that can support the research. The procedures for collecting data are watching the movie, reading the scripts, identifying the data, classifying data, and selecting the data. After the data are collected, the next step is analyzing data by following: Displaying, explaining, and interpreting data.

Finding and Discussion

In this chapter, the researcher will explain and provide evidence about the temperament of the characters and then make a comparison of that.

1. The Characters' Temperament Presented in The *Little Women* (2019) American Movie

Jo March's Temperament

Jo March, in the *Little Women* (2019) movie directed by Greta Gerwig, is the main female character with a passionate, independent, and ambitious character. That character is classified as having a choleric temperament. Individuals with a choleric temperament are often seen as having leadership, courage, assertiveness, independence, impulsiveness, and strong emotional outbursts. These temperamental choleric characters are shown in Jo March's personality, and it can be proven in the script of utterances presented in the following.

Jo : I just feel that Women have minds and souls as well as hearts, ambition, and talent as well as beauty and I'm sick of being told that love is all a woman is fit for. I'm so sick for that, but... I am so lonely.

(*Little Women, 2019: 01.42.20-01.42.55*)

This scene demonstrates that Jo is a strong-willed woman, reflecting her choleric temperament. Her temperament is assertive, passionate, and not easily swayed by pressure or other people's expectations.

Meg March's Temperament

Meg March is the character of the eldest of the March sisters in the 2019 film *Little Women*. Meg's character is formed as a stable and loving figure. As the oldest sister, Meg is very responsible and takes part in looking after her younger siblings. The character shown through Meg in this film can be said to be a character with a phlegmatic temperament. People with a phlegmatic temperament are usually described as calm, patient, affectionate, and tend to avoid conflict. These temperamental phlegmatic characters are shown in Meg March's personality, and it can be proven in the script of utterances presented in the following.

Amy : Well I have to go to school and I don't have any limes.

Jo : Limes?

Amy : The other girls are all trading pickled limes. I'm in debt. I owe ever so many limes.

Meg : Will that do? (giving her a quarter)

Jo : What did you do that for?

Meg : I know what it is to want little things and feel less than other girls.

Amy : Thank you, Meg. Between that and the drawings I should wipe out my debt.

(Little Women, 2019: 00.34.06-00.34.28)

In the scene above, Meg March demonstrates her phlegmatic temperament when she gives money to Amy to help her pay off the debt from buying limes. Amy is upset because she is feeling isolated at school and is worried about not being able to pay her debts. Meg shows empathy and understanding towards Amy's situation and offers her support without blaming her, even though Amy's actions were unnecessary and wasteful.

Beth March's Temperament

Beth March is the third child who is very quiet and not open to the outside world. Even so, Beth has a dream of becoming a famous musician because she has an extraordinary talent for playing the piano. Beth's character exhibits many of the traits associated with a melancholic temperament. Beth is a person with high sensitivity, empathy, introspection, and a love for art. People with a melancholic temperament are usually described as deep thinkers, sensitive, empathetic, and tend to be introspective. These temperamental melancholic characters are shown in Beth March's personality, and it can be proven in the script of utterances presented in the following.

Beth : At least we have father and mother and each other.

Amy : I have lots of wishes, but my favorite one is to be an artist and go to Paris and do fine pictures and be the best painter in the world.

Beth : That's what you want too, isn't it Jo? To be a famous writer?

Jo : Yes, but it sounds so crass when she says it.

Beth : My wish is to have us all to be together with Father and Mother in this house, that's what I want.

Amy : Beth is perfect.

Jo : What about your music, Queen Bess?

Beth : I only do that for us, I don't need anyone else to hear it.

Amy : You must not limit yourself.

(Little Women, 2019: 00.25.27-00.26.42)

The scene above takes place at the March family's house as they celebrate Christmas together. During this moment of togetherness, each sister shares her hopes and desires. When it's Beth's turn, she softly states that her wish is to remain at home with the family. Her wish is simple but profound, reflecting her deep love for her home and family. Beth's statement is met with affectionate

reactions from her siblings, highlighting her deep sensitivity and emotion towards the meaning of family togetherness.

Amy March's Temperament

Amy March is the youngest of four children. Being the youngest child, Amy is famous for her spoiled nature and habit of getting jealous if what she wants doesn't come true. But besides that, Amy has extraordinary talent and ambition. Amy also has high confidence in her work. Amy's character was created as someone cheerful, energetic, and full of enthusiasm. This character includes a character with a sanguine temperament. People with a sanguine temperament are usually described as cheerful, energetic, extroverted, and like to socialize. These temperamental, sanguine characters are shown in Amy March's personality, and it can be proven in the script of utterances presented in the following.

Amy : I have lots of wishes, but my favorite one is to be an artist and go to Paris and do fine pictures and be the best painter in the world.
(*Little Women*, 2019: 00.26.17-00.26.25)

Amy has a strong desire to be known and appreciated. The scene above shows Amy, who dreams of becoming a famous artist. Amy has a great interest in art, and she works hard to develop her artistic talents and aspires to become a famous artist. This attitude shows the creative and passionate side of the sanguine temperament. Creativity and the desire to express oneself are common characteristics of people with a sanguine temperament. In another scene, Amy is also determined to marry a rich man. The scene shows his high ambition and desire to be recognized. This trait reflects a sanguine temperament that is full of enthusiasm and ambition.

2. The Characters' Temperament Presented in The *Little Women* (2022) Korean Drama

Oh In-Joo's Temperament

Oh In-Joo is a central character in the South Korean drama *Little Women* (2022). She is the eldest of three sisters who grew up in poverty and dreamed of a better life. In-Joo's character is known for her strong will and protectiveness over her sisters. In-Joo displays many traits associated with a melancholic temperament, such as introspection, empathy, sensitivity to injustice, sadness, and appreciation of small things. People with a melancholic temperament are usually described as

deep thinkers, sensitive, empathetic, and tend to be introspective. In-Joo's melancholic temperament can be seen and proven through several scenes below.

In-Joo : No, you were wrong. Why are you bringing up money at work? You're an outcast. Why would you show your weakness?

(*Little Women, 2022: episode 1, 00:15:42*)

One of the characteristics of a melancholic temperament is deep thinking and introspection, like in the scene above. The scenes above show an introspection of Oh In-Joo's self when she needed immediate money for her sister. She does not hesitate to ask for a salary in advance from his superiors. But because she felt that her actions were wrong, she was immediately conscious and introspective, speaking to herself as a form of reflection.

Oh In-Kyung's Temperament

Oh In-Kyung in the 2022 Korean drama *Little Women* is the middle sister. A persistent and principled journalist, In-Kyung is committed to uncovering the truth and exposing corruption. In-kyung's character is defined by her integrity, resilience, and unwavering sense of justice, often putting her at odds with powerful figures and dangerous secrets. In-kyung's character is formed as a strong, firm, and brave figure. In Kyung is a character with a choleric temperament. People with a choleric temperament are usually described as passionate, assertive, self-confident, and often stubborn. Here are some scenes that show Oh In-kyung's choleric temperament.

In-Kyung : That attorney was Park Jae-sang. So I started investigating him, and he responded immediately. That was the first time in my career as a journalist that I was tailed.

(*Little Women, 2022: episode 1, 00:49:42*)

One characteristic of the choleric temperament that In-Kyung possesses is the stubbornness of her work, as can be seen in the scene above. The scene shows the stubbornness and courage of In-Kyung after hearing news of a corrupt lawyer running for mayor. In-Kyung investigates an unusual case in the past involving a lawyer. She investigated for days alone for factual news. Her superiors also explained that Kyung had covered the news of the storm by bounding her legs to avoid it. Through the acknowledgment of her superiors, we can see that In Kyung is a good and persistent reporter in her work.

Oh In-Hye's Temperament

Oh In-Hye is the youngest of the three Oh siblings. She is a talented and ambitious art student who struggles with the burden of her family's poverty and her aspirations. In-Hye is the youngest child who is stable, loving, and calm. Oh In-Hye displays many of the traits associated with a phlegmatic temperament, such as calmness, conflict avoidance, patience, empathy, and the ability to deal with pressure calmly. People with a phlegmatic temperament are usually described as calm, patient, compassionate, and tend to avoid conflict. Here are some scenes that show Oh In-Hye's phlegmatic temperament.

In-Hye : Please, Don't do that. Everything Mom said was true, so I'm fine with that, but I hate seeing you two try so hard.
(*Little Women, 2022: episode 1, 00:13:04*)

In-Hye shows a phlegmatic character in the scene above, where her mother takes away the money that was supposed to be for a study tour to Europe, but she remains calm and doesn't panic. In-hye thinks that her mother may have had a compelling reason or urgent need that made her feel compelled to take the money. She tried to view her mother's actions with sympathy and not make a big deal. Her calm, passive, and understanding reactions reflect a phlegmatic, in which a person avoids conflict and tries to understand or tolerate difficult situations.

Conclusion

According to the research findings, there are both variances and parallels in the depiction of character temperaments between the film *Little Women* and the Korean drama *Little Women*. Both adaptations show the second child of the siblings as a tough woman with choleric temperaments: Jo March in the American film and Oh In-Kyung in the Korean drama. However, the other siblings' temperaments differ significantly. The four March siblings exhibit four different temperaments, creating dynamic relationships, while the three Oh siblings have distinct but less varied temperaments. For instance, Meg March, the eldest in the American film, is phlegmatic, acting as a calming, loving presence, whereas the youngest Oh sibling, Oh In-Hye, holds this phlegmatic role in the Korean drama. The eldest Oh sibling, Oh In-Joo, is melancholic, focusing on her siblings'

feelings, contrasting with Beth March, the melancholic third child in the American film, and Amy March, the sanguine youngest sibling. The study also highlights that the different socio-cultural backgrounds of the 19th-century American setting and the modern Korean context significantly influence the portrayal of characters' temperaments.

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