

A Study of Alice Munro's Novels in Perspective of Feminist Literary Criticism

Based on Corpus Stylistics

基于语料库文体学的女性主义文学批评 视角下艾丽丝·门罗小说研究

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Abstract Alice Munro, the first Canadian woman to win the Nobel Prize for Literature, is renowned for her portrayals of women's lives in small-town northern Canada. Her works reflect a feminist focus, often addressing alienation, confinement, and self-definition within patriarchal structures. However, most studies on Munro's work rely heavily on qualitative methods, leaving room for more objective approaches. This study combines feminist literary criticism with corpus stylistics to address this gap, offering a balanced analysis of feminist elements in Munro's writing. A corpus of 14 Munro short stories is compared with a reference corpus of works by contemporary male Booker Prize-winning authors using AntConc software. Keyword analysis reveals four major thematic elements: feminism, family, small towns, and winter. Collocational and concordance analyses further explore gendered keywords, highlighting Munro's unique emphasis on women's emotions and inner lives. The findings underscore Munro's distinct narrative perspective, particularly in her portrayal of the female body, which contrasts sharply with male authors of her time. The corpus stylistics analysis approach offers a fresh perspective on understanding Munro's literary contributions.

Keywords Alice Munro; Corpus Stylistics; Feminism; Body Narratives

1. Introduction

In 2013, Canadian author Alice Munro (1931–2024) became the first female Canadian and the thirteenth woman overall to win the Nobel Prize for Literature. Even before this recognition, Munro had received numerous prestigious awards, including the Governor General's Award for Literature in Canada, the O. Henry Prize, and the UK's Booker Prize, cementing her reputation as a master of the short story. Grounded in her childhood hometown of Ontario, her works explore the lives of women, uncovering conflict within the mundane and portraying their struggles with societal

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expectations, relationships, and personal identity. These narratives, rich in detail and depth, have inspired extensive research.

Studies of Munro's work generally fall into four categories: narrative studies, regional literary studies, writerly studies, and feminist studies. Narrative studies focus on the structural and thematic elements of her stories, as seen in works like *Probable Fictions: Alice Munro's Narrative Acts* (1983). Regional studies emphasize the small-town settings prevalent in her work, reflecting the Canadian literary emphasis on regional identity during her early career, such as in "Munro's Wonderland" (1978). Writerly studies examine changes in Munro's style across her career, exemplified by *The Other Country: Patterns in the Writing of Alice Munro* (1993). Feminist studies, which have gained prominence more recently, explore Munro's portrayal of female subjectivity and resistance within patriarchal contexts, as seen in Glad Godard's "Heirs of the Living Body" (1984).

Feminist literary criticism of Munro often aligns with the second-wave feminist movement, which sought to deconstruct societal attitudes toward women and promote female agency. However, much of this research is qualitative, relying on subjective interpretation. This study introduces corpus stylistics as a novel approach to address this subjectivity. Corpus stylistics combines literature and linguistics, systematically analyzing linguistic patterns in literary texts. This methodology, increasingly popular in stylistics, allows for the integration of quantitative data with qualitative insights to achieve a more balanced critique.

This research employs a feminist lens enhanced by corpus analysis to examine Munro's works objectively. A collection of her short stories serves as the research corpus, alongside a reference corpus of male Booker Prize-winning authors. Keywords extracted through AntConc software are analyzed and categorized into thematic fields to identify recurring themes. Additionally, the collocational and concordance analyses of gendered pronouns explore the portrayal of women in Munro's stories, revealing distinctive features of her female characters. This study demonstrates the potential of combining corpus stylistics and feminist criticism to offer new insights into Munro's contributions to literature.

2. Literature review

2.1. Introduction to Munro

Alice Munro, born in 1931 in Ontario, Canada, is widely regarded as one of the most acclaimed short story writers globally. Her upbringing in a small-town environment, combined with her experiences as a housewife and writer, deeply influenced her literary voice. After publishing her first short story collection, *Dance of the Happy Shades* (1968), which won the Governor General's Award for Literature, Munro gained prominence in Canadian literary circles. Throughout her career, she published 14 collections of short stories, earning numerous accolades, including the Nobel Prize

for Literature in 2013, the first time the award was given to a writer primarily for short stories.

Munro's work began attracting critical attention in the 1970s. Halvard Dahlie's 1972 essay marked the first thematic analysis of her work, focusing on its regional character. Critics like Alex De Wier highlighted Munro's creation of fictional worlds rooted in small-town northern Canada, emphasizing their cultural identity. As her influence spread, critical focus shifted beyond geography to stylistic and thematic studies.

In 1980, Helen Hoy's essay "Dull, Simple, Amazing and Unfathomable" analyzed Munro's prose and linguistic precision, sparking broader studies into her narrative techniques. Louis MacKendrick's *Probable Fictions: Alice Munro's Narrative Acts* (1983) explored her mastery of storytelling, particularly her use of flashbacks and interpolations. Brandon Conlon's "Munro's Wonderland" (1978) focused on her portrayal of rural Ontario.

Feminist studies also gained traction, examining how Munro's identity influenced her work. These studies analyzed themes of gender, character development, and feminist discourse. Martin W. R.'s *Alice Munro: Paradox and Parallel* (1987) examined the evolution of Munro's writing style, providing a comprehensive perspective. Collectively, these diverse approaches underscore Munro's significance in literary studies.

2.2. Corpus Stylistics

In the first half of the 20th century, modern linguistics advanced significantly, and new theories emerged to analyze texts. Linguists suggested specific links between linguistic patterns and a text's artistic or thematic effects. Charles Barrie, a student of Saussure, pioneered modern stylistics based on structuralist linguistics. Recognized as an interdisciplinary discipline in 1958, stylistics applies linguistic theory to text analysis, focusing on how texts convey meaning (Shen, 2004).

Since the 1980s, the development of corpus linguistics and computer technology has enabled the electronic processing of texts. Mahlberg (2012) defined corpus stylistics as the application of corpus methods to literary texts, combining linguistic description with literary appreciation. Unlike traditional stylistics, which relies on empirical studies and qualitative interpretation, corpus stylistics uses quantitative methods to analyze linguistic patterns, enabling the study of individual authors or genres (Mahlberg, 2012).

Semino and Shoa's *Corpus Stylistics* (2004) explored the use of corpora in stylistics, proving its value and guiding future research. Wynne (2006) analyzed the implications of corpus stylistics for literary criticism, while Mahlberg (2010) emphasized the need to combine quantitative and qualitative methods. Studies such as Tabata's (1993) analysis of Dickens and Mahlberg's (2007) focus on high-frequency clusters in Dickens' works exemplify corpus stylistics' applications. Similarly, Starcke and Bettina (2009) used corpus techniques to reinterpret Jane Austen's themes

and characters.

After 2010, corpus stylistics studies of Munro's fiction emerged. Chen Chan (2014) used word clusters and key lexical features to analyze Munro's works, highlighting their role in plot development and characterization. Hasab El-Nabi (2018) examined Munro's lexical system, emphasizing feminist characteristics and artistic effects. However, while corpus studies on Munro have revealed valuable insights, the intersection of corpus stylistics and feminist literary criticism remains underexplored.

2.3 The Dissemination of Alice Munro's Works in China

The dissemination of Alice Munro's works in China has developed over time, moving from limited exposure in literary journals to broader recognition and academic study. As a celebrated Canadian short story writer, Munro's works became known to Chinese readers in the 1980s through translations in journals and anthologies. However, her audience was small and mostly consisted of literary enthusiasts and academics. In 2009, Munro won the Man Booker International Prize, increasing interest in her stories in China. This interest grew significantly in 2013, when she was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature; her works gained greater recognition.

Li Wenjun played a crucial role in introducing Munro's works to Chinese readers. In 2009, he translated *Runaway*, Munro's short story collection, which became the first complete edition of her work in Chinese. Li's translation was praised for faithfully reproducing Munro's narrative style and linguistic subtleties, allowing Chinese readers to experience her unique storytelling. By focusing on Munro's hallmark techniques, such as shifting timelines, detailed descriptions, and introspective characters, Li's work bridged cultural gaps and made her stories more accessible. His efforts helped lay the groundwork for the wider spread of Munro's works in China.

The Nobel Prize further spurred academic interest in Munro's writings. Chinese scholars explored her narrative techniques, themes of identity and culture, and feminist perspectives. For example, Zhou Yi analyzed how Munro's stories reflect Canadian society and culture. These studies deepened the understanding of Munro's work among Chinese readers and established her as an important literary figure. Munro's influence also extended beyond translations and research. Film adaptations of her stories, such as *Silence*, gained attention in China, prompting new readers to discover her works.

Munro's storytelling also inspired Chinese writers and literary discussions. Her focus on ordinary lives and emotional complexity resonates with Chinese literary traditions, which value subtlety and depth. Additionally, her exploration of women's inner conflicts aligns with feminist themes in Chinese literature, sparking dialogue about similar topics in the local context.

In summary, the dissemination of Alice Munro's works in China has progressed through

translations, academic research, and adaptations. Li Wenjun's translations were a significant milestone in this process, introducing her work to Chinese readers in a way that respected her original style. Munro's growing recognition has enriched cross-cultural exchanges and contributed to literary studies in China. As more of her works become available and research continues, her influence in China is expected to expand further.

3. Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative corpus techniques for data collection and analysis with qualitative feminist literary criticism for interpretation. The methodology is divided into three sections: data collection, data processing, and the application of corpus techniques using AntConc software.

3.1. Data Collection

Two research paths exist in corpus stylistics: analyzing a single corpus to identify patterns or comparing a research corpus with a reference corpus to highlight distinctive linguistic features. This study adopts the latter to examine Alice Munro's novels from a feminist perspective by comparing her work with those of male Booker Prize-winning authors.

The reference corpus was constructed based on the following principles: alignment with Munro's literary value, relevance to feminist themes, and a size exceeding that of Munro's corpus. The Booker Prize was chosen for its high standard of selection, ensuring comparability. Munro's corpus consists of 14 collections of short stories, spanning her career from *Dance of the Happy Shades* (1968) to *Dear Life* (2012), with a word token count of 1,349,384. The reference corpus contains 31 works by male Booker Prize winners from 1970 to 2013, with a word token count of 3,392,944. Texts were sourced from Amazon and converted into computer-readable formats.

3.2. Data Processing

AntConc software, developed by Dr. Laurence Anthony, was employed for corpus analysis. Key functions include generating keyword lists, identifying collocation patterns, and analyzing n-grams.

Keyword analysis identifies words that occur with unusual frequency in the research corpus compared to the reference corpus. Following Phillips (1985), keywords were categorized into semantic fields to explore the "aboutness" of texts. Using AntConc, the top 200 high-frequency keywords in Munro's works were analyzed, excluding proper nouns and unrelated terms. This analysis revealed four major thematic fields.

To generate a keyword list, reference and research corpora were loaded into AntConc, and the keyword function was activated. The process involved filtering out irrelevant terms, such as definite articles and conjunctions.

Collocation patterns examine the co-occurrence of words to identify linguistic features

influencing literary effects and thematic expression. This study analyzed collocations of gendered pronouns, such as "she" and "her," to explore Munro's portrayal of female characters. Modern corpus tools expose subtle patterns, enabling deeper insight into Munro's perspectives on gender.

To generate collocations, the target term was input into AntConc's collocation function, which identified associated words and their proximity.

Word Clusters, or N-grams, consist of frequently recurring phrases that reflect both lexical and grammatical features. As noted by Starcke (2006), studying high-frequency clusters aids in uncovering literary meaning. This study utilized AntConc's n-grams tool to detect patterns in Munro's works, revealing expressions that contribute to the text's thematic depth.

The length and order of n-grams were adjustable within AntConc. Irrelevant clusters were filtered using a stop list, which excluded personal names and common articles or conjunctions.

Stop List Application. To refine the results, a stop list was created in TXT format, excluding terms such as "and", "a", and personal names. This list was added to AntConc's word list preferences, ensuring focus on relevant linguistic patterns.

Summary: This methodological approach allows for systematic exploration of Munro's linguistic features. By integrating quantitative data with feminist literary criticism, the study reveals distinct thematic and stylistic elements in her works, thereby enhancing our understanding of her unique contribution to feminist literature.

4. Main findings

4.1. Research framework

Using the corpus of male writers as a reference corpus, the keywords in Munro's works were extracted and classified according to semantic fields, thus analyzing what subjects Munro's novels pay extra attention to compared to male writers. Next, representative keywords were selected from each semantic field; their collocates were analyzed, and the language patterns that were not attended to were identified. The next step is to select representative keywords from each semantic field, analyze their collocate, identify unnoticed linguistic patterns, and examine what semantic messages these patterns convey in the context of concordance. Finally, in the context of feminist literary criticism, the semantic information is analyzed in terms of what kind of female writer's perspective is reflected in these semantic messages.

4.2. Data overview.

The top 200 Keynesses in Munro's novels were extracted through AntConc, eliminating proper nouns (mainly personal names) from them. To further eliminate chance, words that occur individually at the semantic level were eliminated. The final result consisted of 39 words, which fell into four semantic fields: personal pronouns, character identity, and place and season.

4.3. Main findings

4.3.1 The analysis of keyness

This study analyses the “aboutness” of Munro’s novels through four semantic fields formed by keyness, and achieves a preliminary exploration of the themes of Munro’s novels.

Table 1: Personal Pronouns

Rank	Keywords	Frequency	keyness
1	She	27830	14151.23
2	Her	17675	5024.52
3	Herself	1334	738.58

Table 1 highlights three high-frequency keywords in Munro’s works that belong to the semantic field of personal pronouns: she, her, and herself. These feminine pronouns highlight the prevalence of female characters and their narratives in her stories, underscoring the recurring theme of femininity. Munro’s writing reflects the plight and resistance of women, aligning with Beauvoir’s existentialist view that patriarchal culture denies women self-definition, rendering them “the Other” (Beauvoir, 1968). This imposed identity traps women in existential dilemmas, as their passive acceptance of societal restrictions deepens their predicament. However, Munro’s heroines often find ways to resist and reclaim autonomy, showcasing their awareness and efforts to escape societal constraints (Zhang, 1998).

In *Boys and Girls* (2013), considered the standout story of *Dance of the Happy Shades* (2013), Munro portrays a young girl grappling with gender expectations. Growing up on a farm, the girl admires her father’s work and rejects her mother’s domestic role. However, as she matures, her mother imposes traditional expectations, and her father ultimately selects her brother as the farm’s heir. The girl reluctantly conforms, embodying the conflict between individual aspirations and societal roles.

In *The Beggar Girl* (2011), Munro explores the tension between love and independence. Rose, a poor girl, forms a romantic relationship with Patrick, a wealthy man. Patrick’s idealized vision of her as submissive and fragile conflicts with Rose’s strong sense of self. Rose ultimately chooses independence over conformity, leaving her lover to pursue an uncertain future. The open-ended conclusion, with Rose wandering through an airport, underscores her ongoing search for identity.

The Office (2015) tells the story of a married woman seeking freedom from domestic confines to establish a professional space. Through the symbol of the “office,” Munro critiques societal barriers faced by women aspiring to careers. Similarly, in *Runaway* (2016), Munro presents Carla, a woman trapped in an abusive marriage. Once a girl who defied her family for love, Carla dreams of escaping her oppressive life but ultimately returns, highlighting the paradox of love and marriage as both

nurturing and confining.

Munro's collection *The Lives of Girls and Women* (2015) consists of interconnected stories tracing Dahl's development from girlhood to womanhood. As one of Munro's longest works, it encapsulates her ability to portray various stages of a woman's life.

Overall, Munro's protagonists span a spectrum of life stages, from naïve girls to women burdened by domesticity and old women facing death. Her stories delicately capture women's struggles within societal constraints and their attempts at resistance. Though these efforts are not always successful, the very act of resisting represents a shift in their existential state. Munro masterfully uncovers the realities of women's lives, offering nuanced depictions of their resilience and perseverance.

Table 2: Personhood (identity as a natural person, identity in the family, identity in society)

Rank	Keywords	Frequency	keyness
1	mother	2702	1099.06
2	aunt	395	409.4
3	Uncle	449	276.44
4	Women	1230	257.35
5	Teacher	244	238.66
6	girls	520	222.55
7	Momma	95	203.35
8	Girl	862	197.88
9	Grandmother	235	178.43
10	Baby	412	142.49
11	Children	810	115.71
12	Kids	145	112.71
13	Friends	422	111.63
13	Students	104	106
14	Sisters	126	91.06
15	neighbors	52	81.91

Among the top 15 high-frequency words related to personal identity, those directly indicating “female” include *women*, *girls/girl*, and familial terms such as *mother*, *aunt*, *momma*, *grandmother*, and *sisters*. This indicates that Munro references female characters more frequently than male writers. High-frequency words related to family relationships, such as *mother*, *aunt*, *uncle*, *momma*, *grandmother*, and *sisters*, account for 40% of the total, highlighting the centrality of family life in her work. Additionally, terms like *neighbors*, although not family members, often appear in familial contexts, emphasizing her focus on the interconnectedness of family and community life.

Munro frequently explores childhood and development through terms such as girls/girls, baby, children, and kids, which reflect themes of immaturity and growth. Social relations, represented by terms such as teacher and student, further reinforce the themes of childhood education and development. Familial terms such as mother-children/kids/baby denote parent-child relationships, while aunt/uncle-grandmother highlight intergenerational bonds. These relationships highlight the significance of family dynamics in Munro's narratives, which frequently portray diverse family models that reflect societal change.

Munro's works reveal tensions within families stemming from three primary issues: unequal power dynamics, patriarchal ideologies, and conflicts over individual identity. In *Dance of Happy Shadows*, the story *Going to the Seaside* portrays a grandmother exercising absolute authority over her daughter, Hazel, and granddaughter, May. Through daily interactions, Munro demonstrates the imbalance of power within the family. Similarly, in *Open Secrets*, Maureen becomes subservient to her irritable husband, illustrating how patriarchal family structures can marginalize women.

Patriarchal inequality appears frequently in Munro's works. In *The Beggar's Daughter*, gender-based discrimination is evident as a sister is punished more harshly than her brother for the same misdeed. In *Father*, Delia's father Harvey dominates his family through violence and verbal abuse, driving his daughters into submission. Eventually, Delia reclaims her autonomy by fleeing the toxic environment, underscoring Munro's focus on the struggle for individual freedom within oppressive family systems.

Tensions in family relationships often revolve around women, particularly those burdened with the dual responsibilities of motherhood and personal identity. In *The Process of Love*, Isabel embodies this conflict. Initially, a devoted wife and mother, Isabel's conventional middle-class life becomes unfulfilling. Seeking personal satisfaction, she engages in an affair, ultimately torn between her roles as wife, mother, and lover. Her internal struggles lead to the collapse of her once-stable family life, highlighting the pressures women face in balancing social roles and desires.

Overall, Munro's portrayal of family relationships is both realistic and diverse. Her narratives explore the dynamics and conflicts within families, particularly the challenges faced by female members. Through nuanced depictions, Munro reflects societal shifts in family structures and critiques traditional gender roles, offering profound insights into the complexities of human relationships and the pursuit of ethical family values.

Table 3: Space for activities

Rank	Keywords	Frequency	keyness
1	house	2083	863.03
2	town	1080	804.38

3	school	1183	783.58
4	store	474	701.99
5	home	1377	427.44
6	kitchen	756	328.59
7	college	216	211.22
8	highway	154	185.01
9	church	459	151.71
10	Hospital	294	132.57
11	Houses	323	91.47
12	Groceries	46	91.45
13	Downtown	62	86.77
14	Stores	76	85.19
15	grocery	50	75.55

House has the highest criticality and frequency of all keywords indicating activity space.

The above phrases can be categorized according to their function as follows.

Household: house, home, kitchen, houses...

Social functional places: school, store, college, highway, church, hospital, grocery stores...

Regional places: town, downtown...

The frequent occurrence of spatial terms in Munro's works, such as place, town, grocery shops, shops, and schools, reflects her emphasis on creating dynamic spaces for human activity. Lefebvre's theory of space suggests a reciprocal relationship between space and the body, where each shapes and constrains the other, contributing to the transformation of social life and human identity (Wu, 2007). Literary space in Munro's works goes beyond the traditional backdrop role, becoming an active element linked to female identity and consciousness. It engages directly in plot development and characterization, as many of her female characters use their spatial surroundings to explore self-worth and identity (Rasporich, 1990).

Munro constructs her literary space, often modeled after her hometown in Ontario, as a "Munro Tract," encompassing regions such as Gedrich, Lake Huron, and Lake Hurley. Within this setting, she crafts diverse lives, portraying characters who either remain tied to the town or struggle to escape its constraints. The small-town setting becomes both a nurturing environment and a source of tension. Some characters grow old within its confines, finding solace or pain in family and community, while others, driven by an awakened sense of independence, view the town as restrictive and seek liberation through escape.

Munro focuses on two key spatial constructions. The first is the broader small-town space,

encompassing locations such as shops, schools, and churches, reflecting the northern Canadian landscape. These spaces evolve, providing a dynamic backdrop for characters' lives as they navigate realistic social and natural interactions. The second is domestic space, which, while more confined, is rich in emotional and physical conflict. Domestic spaces in Munro's works include communal areas emphasizing belonging and safety, as well as physical structures such as duplex houses with attics and basements that children explore. These spaces often reflect Munro's own childhood experiences. For instance, the house extends beyond its walls to spaces like horse farms, as seen in *Escape*, which, while distant, remain integral to the family's domain.

Women in Munro's novels have complex relationships with the spaces they inhabit. On one hand, the towns they grew up in instill in them a sense of resilience and belonging. On the other hand, these spaces often fall short of their ideal lives, becoming sources of constraint and dissatisfaction. This tension drives the recurring theme of "escape" in Munro's works, where women strive to break free from the limitations imposed by their spatial environments to pursue new possibilities. By exploring characters' interactions with space, Munro illuminates their choices and transformations, revealing life's uncertainties through the dynamics of spatial relationships.

Table 4: Seasons and weather

Rank	Keywords	Frequency	keyness
1	summer	30	277.92
2	snow	304	255.32
3	winter	204	186.77
4	spring	184	80.92

The last semantic field of interest in the Munro fiction corpus is the seasonal semantic field, where the most critical word is "summer", but with a frequency of only thirty times; snow, as an important natural element of winter, ranks second in criticality, with a frequency of 304 times; "winter" as an important natural element in winter, ranked second in criticality with a frequency of 304 times; "winter" ranked third in criticality with a frequency of 204 times. In comparison, the most prominent natural elements in Munro's work are winter and snow compared to male writers.

Munro's depiction of elements of winter and snow and ice may be related to the climatic characteristics and geography of northern Canada. Due to its high latitude, northern Canada experiences a cold climate and is often covered in snow and ice during winter. The snow and cold wilderness of winter left a deep impression on Munro, who grew up in a small northern town since childhood. She sets her stories in the winter wilderness or snow-covered farmland, utilizing the raw, barren quality of such natural spaces to convey the harsh realities of life. The female characters interact with the snow and ice in winter, giving birth to unprecedented ideas and achieving a spiritual

transformation.

In the short story “Winter Wind”, a snowstorm rages through the village, covering the wilderness and shrubs in deep snow, leaving the world cold and flat, white. Such a scene is full of death and has the power to destroy everything. But unlike the panic felt by the others in the village, the young girl walking in the snowy wilderness felt a freedom she had not felt in a long time. The snowstorm frees her from the hardships of her mother's illness and her household chores, allowing her to enjoy a moment of peace and to gain a great deal of spiritual strength from her interaction with nature. At the end of the story, before the girl is ready to return home, her grandmother insists that she stay behind because the snow and wind have not yet stopped. The young girl is initially unaware of the dangers of the snowy wilderness, but later learns that her neighbour Herman has died after getting lost in the blizzard, which makes her realize the fragility of life and the difficulty of surviving, and makes her appreciate the family life she has. On the whole, Munro's winter is closely associated with slaughter and death, but it is this atmosphere of gloom and despair that gives rise to a new spiritual power.

After categorizing the keywords and carrying out thematic analysis, the researcher filtered out the two keywords that had the highest weight and were often central to the narrative, for collocates and concordance analysis. In order to filter out distractors, the values were set at a collocates stat of 4 or more and a frequency of 20 or more. On the basis of the data, further analysis of the portrayal of women in Munro's novels is carried out and Munro's feminist ideas are explored in depth.

4.3.2 Collocates and concordance analysis of she and her

Table 5: Collocates of she

Rank	Collocates	Frequency	Stat
1	Breathed	21	4.84
2	Wakes	20	4.77
3	believes	22	4.63
4	Wears	27	4.45
5	feels	68	4.26

Table 2 shows the high-frequency collocation pattern of she, i.e., she, as the core word, tends to co-occur with five verbs such as breathed and woke in the corpus of Munro's short stories. Among them, breathed and woke belong to verbs describing characters' actions, wears belong to beliefs, and feels belong to verbs describing characters' thoughts and emotions. The occurrence of these verbs with she reflects that Munro not only meticulously portrays female characters' actions, but also pays extra attention to their psychological processes.

Extract1. Concordance lines breathed*

1. She pressed his warm, fresh skin. She breathed and waited. She breathed and waited again.
2. How she picked it up, how she breathed. Let it be her.
3. Because of the thin, cool air she breathed since Pierre's death, she could think
4. Then she raised her head, breathed deeply and noisily
5. She moved like a stiff old woman and breathed warily each time she lowered herself into a chair.

Breathing, in the Oxford Dictionary, has a variety of interpretations, and according to the index, the meaning used in the text can be judged to be to exhale air from the lungs; to blow gently on (or upon) a person or thing, or into a thing. For example, the perception of a fictional character's own state of breathing typically implies a different state of breathing than usual. The focus on the individual's state of breathing from the perspective of other characters in the novel presents two possibilities: an abnormal state and a normal state. The third-party narrator's depiction of individual breathing may be relevant to revealing the psychological activity of the characters. Munro's portrayal of female breathing occurs in two contexts: self-calming in times of despair and repression and self-regulation in times of excitement. In either context, breathing is a barometer of the female character's mood swings.

In example sentence one, Munro portrays the heroine in a state of eroticism. Unlike the usual erotic scenes, Munro's perspective focuses on the female character's state of breathing, creating a sexually charged yet subtle atmosphere through the description of the heroine holding her breath and waiting for feedback from her partner, reflecting the female writer's meticulous observation and delicate expression.

Extract2. Concordance lines *Wakes**

1. When she wakes, it is full morning, though only twenty past.
2. She wakes. It's raining outside and dark.
3. She wakes up. The night seems fiery hot
4. But I think when she wakes up, she'll feel better

Wake, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, means not sleeping, but being awake instead. Wake is a verb, but this does not correspond to an external action, but to a change in the person's sanity and state of being. The text mostly serves as a segmentation of the female character's state, as she moves from a sleeping state of consciousness to placing her mind in a realistic space-time, followed by a new point in time, or the images the waking heroine sees, or the state of the weather at this point in the novel's objective environment, giving the novel a clever sense of scene shift in its content, even if the female character's body is not physically displaced in the physical sense. The writer utilizes the state of 'wake' in the narrative to establish a connection between the space-time of thought, where there is no subjective control over conscious activity, and the realm of reality,

where conscious activity is present.

Extract3. Concordance lines Believes*

1. She believes he's getting better.
2. But what she believes she is doing, what she wants to do.
3. She believes she wouldn't quit even.
4. She believes that she does mean to continue it.
5. She believes they could have another life.

Believe, according to Oxford English Dictionary, means "to have confidence or faith in, and consequently to rely on or trust to a person or (Theology) a god or the name of a god." "Belief" is not only the knowledge of something objective, but also determination, and in Munro's work, the female characters' "belief" is, in many cases, their own, often in the sense that they are confident that they have. The expression means that they have confidence in their ability to do something or to accomplish a certain mental state. The characterization of the female characters reflects their independence and strong, fearless mental strength.

Extract4. Concordance lines Wears*

1. She always wears long sleeves to hide her tattoos.
2. She is middle-aged and wears a dress of shot.
3. She often wears black pants—as she does today.
4. She wears a good dress, navy blue with little flowers.

Wear, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, means to carry or bear on one's body or some member of it, for covering, warmth, ornament, etc.; to be dressed in; to be covered or decked with; to have on. "In Munro's novels, it is very common to describe the dress of female characters. Tine Bell once said, "Our clothes are part of us for most of us, and one cannot be completely indifferent to one's environment: the spun goods that are worn on us are like natural extensions of our bodies and even our souls." (Entwistle, 2005) In modern society, clothing has become a nearly silent spokesperson for individuals, reflecting their status and possessions on one hand, and revealing their character traits and inner world on the other. Traditionally, women, who are expected to be modest at all times, face stricter social dress codes than men and spend more time than men on matching their clothes. Munro, as a female writer, reflects this situation well in her novels.

Extract5. Concordance lines Feels*

1. She can barely answer; she feels such gratitude.
2. She feels a desolate satisfaction.
3. She doesn't know but feels a right to despise.
4. She feels a freshness, a peace in the conversation.

Feel, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, means to be capable of any kind of sensory

perception. Conscious activity is more difficult to observe than behaviour. One of the novel's great strengths is that it makes the characters' mental activities transparent and presents them to the reader in writing, allowing them to observe what is happening at the level of their consciousness. Using third-person narration, Munro does not skimp on describing women's feelings, placing the female characters at the centre of the world constructed by the text, capturing their subtle changes so that their hidden feelings and rich inner worlds are on full display. While presenting the rich emotional feelings of the female characters, it also reflects Munro's tendency to write with a personalized experience of life and a focus on the sensual world.

Table 6: collocates of her

Rank	Collocates	Frequency	Stat
1	cheeks	62	5.61
2	purse	46	5.15
3	lips	81	5.08
4	hip	27	5.06

Table 6 shows the high-frequency collocations that co-occur with her. Of the four words above, only purse is the name of an object, while the other four words are all body parts, indicating the presence of a large number of descriptions of women's bodies in the novel, reflecting Munro's concern for the bodies of female characters.

Extract6. Concordance lines cheek*

1. Lauren's face was in her hands, and she tapped her blackberry fingernails on her cheeks.
2. She would demand that we rouge her cheeks and fix her hair.
3. Ruddy skin, a rough texture to her cheeks and neck.
4. My grandmother would rub a little rouge on her cheeks.
5. Sometimes there were patches of red on her cheeks as if she had scratched them.
6. She was flushed as if the spots in her cheeks had spread all over her face.

Of all the collocation patterns for her, the collocation with cheek is the most notable, illustrating the focus on the female character's face in Munro's novel. According to concordance, Munro's most common description of the face is rough and rosy. This is consistent with the town's climate, the habits of its residents, and their aesthetic preferences. Due to their productive activities, the women of the town are constantly in their natural environment, leaving behind the inevitable traces of their labour. The women involved in production are rugged and healthy, and Munro's description of the rosy and rough cheeks reveals the writer's appreciation of the healthy and wild beauty of women.

Extract7. Concordance lines Purse *

1. She was not even carrying a purse and was unlikely those other women.
2. And also, some special pills—for her heart—from her purse. Unnecessary kindness to a lonely

female who had lost her purse and came to play by herself.

3. She put the paper in her purse, carefully and without excitement.

4. She should destroy the piece of paper in her purse, on which she had written his instructions.

Purse is an unexpectedly high-frequency collocation with 'Her', especially given that all collocations other than 'purse' are body parts, and Purse belongs to the category of feminine, highly private objects. According to modern deconstructionism, human necessities and human beings together constitute the concept of 'self'. Due to its limited capacity, the purse is often filled with women's necessities, and in an abstract sense, it can be seen as an extension of the female body. Additionally, the purse, as a form of dress code, serves as a reflection of the owner's social class, habits, and aesthetic preferences. The complexity and subtlety of women's feelings towards the purse are difficult to detect by male writers who do not have the same experience.

Extract8. Concordance lines Lips*

1. With his eyes open, follow every twitch of her candy lips and sway of her sumptuous bottom.

2. While he talked, she moved her closed lips and her hidden tongue.

3. But with a small flick of his tongue along her lips, a reminder of private appetites.

4. Rather, being with the other pallbearers—not singing, biting her lips, and looking preposterously hopeful.

5. Katy bit her lips but then could not resist a severe reply.

Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, saw the lips as an important sexual organ, and despite the many challenges to this theory, they occupy an undisputed place in the expression of desire. In the field of literary production, the lips, as an important part of the body, have been included in the study of bodily narratives. In *Body Alive: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative*, Peter Brooks highlights the interactivity of the body and plot, explaining the intervention of a symbolic body part into the narrative. The lips, as a symbolic body part, are closely associated with sexual expression in literary production. And in Munro's novels, the lips of female characters are often the object of observation for male characters, creating an ambiguous atmosphere by implicitly illustrating the proximity of physical distance between them.

Extract9. Concordance lines Hips*

1. Mary with Young James on her hip and many others.

2. Pauline hoisted Mara onto her hip and summoned Caitlin.

3. James is still of a size to ride on her hip or still in need of her.

And even in that memory, her mother was only a hip and a shoulder.

4. If the child wasn't safe here, she juggled her on one hip while she fished the egg out.

The Hip is one of the sexual characteristics of women. In both literature and cinema, scenes focusing on Hip have always attempted to show the feminine sex appeal. On the hip is the most

frequent word cluster in hip's concordance, and appears in the context of parent-child play, when Hip is no longer a physical symbol of sensuality, but a symbol of motherhood. The scene of the young child riding on the mother's hip appears several times in Munro's novel, not only as a physical contact between the child and the mother, but also as a gestation of the mother-child bond. Munro's capture of this scene breaks the male gaze on the female body and replaces it with a female perspective on the body, allowing the female body to display a different kind of charm and the greatness of motherhood.

5. Conclusion

Based on keyword extraction and semantic field analysis, it is found that Munro shows a prominent interest in four areas: female third-person pronouns, character identity words, spatial place words, and seasonal weather words, compared to male writers. The different themes that form around these four semantic fields all reflect Munro's feminist creative tendencies.

The use of the female third-person pronoun demonstrates that the narrative of women in Munro's novels goes beyond the narrative of female characters developed by male writers of the same period. The presence of feminine themes in Munro's novels is evident in the context of specific works. In the kingdom Munro has created, women of different ages face various dilemmas in their lives, which give rise to diverse spiritual aspirations, and ultimately, they make their own choices in the face of reality. The phenomenon of women's confinement and even marginalisation in a patriarchal society.

In Munro's use of identity words for his characters, the words for family members make up a large proportion, showing the importance Munro's novels attach to family relationships. An analysis of the text reveals that the relationships between family members in Munro's novels can be categorized into three distinct models: a power-centred model, a patriarchal model, and a model in which the identities of individual family members are dislocated. In all three of these models, the centre of conflict is always the female character, and the female characters' attempts to find a breakthrough in the disharmonious family relationships reflect Munro's sense of female self-liberation.

The spatial concept utilizes the town and the family home as the two cores to create a fully functional space for activities. While providing space for the female characters to move around, they also become involved in the process of creating a female image. On the one hand, in the interaction between man and space, the space shapes the character and behavioural patterns of the female characters; on the other hand, the limited nature of the space hinders the further development of the female characters and intensifies the conflict between the female characters and their surroundings. Munro's shaping of space reveals the environmental dilemma in the female predicament.

The seasonal weather words, centred on winter and snow, highlight the harshness and harshness of the natural environment, but the powerful forces of nature also provide motivation and a spiritual outlet for the female characters.

The analysis of collocates and concordance, two key words often used as starting points for narrative, reveals that Munro pays particular attention to the psychological activities and feelings of the female characters in his portrayal, focusing on their spiritual world. The female body in Munro's writing is not an object of spectacle or a carrier of sexual desire, but an externalisation of the female spirit, encompassing both the free pursuit of eroticism and the physical expression of women as other characters, such as mothers. All in all, Munro's works contain the subtle, sensitive, and complex psychological changes and emotional growth of women. Munro is particularly adept at capturing the hidden emotions and fluctuations of ordinary women's psyches in everyday life and projecting the fluctuations and changes in the spiritual world of female characters through these subtle psychological nuances and feelings, which is a distinctly different style of writing from that of male writers.

Finally, there are still some gaps in this study, such as not extracting keywords from the works of male writers for comparison and further analysis of the differences between Munro and male writers in terms of lexical choice and thematic choice; and not extracting the works of contemporaneous female writers to build a corpus for parallel comparison. The overall study is based on the comparison of keywords and does not extend to word clusters, sentence complexity, and other aspects. All the above research directions need further improvement.

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