

## Denoting Phrases in Susan Wheeler's 'Song for the Spirit of Natalie Going'

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### Abstract:

Susan Wheeler (1955- ) is a prolific American poet who published six books of poetry, most recently is *Meme* (2012). Her poetic style is characterized by its ambiguity. She is resistant to interpretation and says that if she puts into account the reader's ability to understand her poetry, she will censor the emotion that guides her. In *Song for the Spirit of Natalie Going*, the phrases are very ambiguous, because they are not included in complete sentences; they are separated from the rest of the poem by commas and dashes. These phrases denote some meanings; the reader should interpret them to solve the poem. In order to interpret these denoting phrases, the researcher applies Bertrand Russell's 'Denoting Phrases' theory to the poem. Russell believes that a phrase is denoting solely through its form and there are four classes to interpret a phrase in order to understand its sole preposition. These four classes will help interpret the poem's denoting phrases; solve it. This study will prove that Russell's theory is applicable to Wheeler's *Song for the Spirit of Natalie Going* and is very helpful to solve it.

Phrase- Bertrand Russell- Susan Wheeler- *Meme*- style

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Susan Wheeler (1955- ) is a prolific American poet who published six books of poetry, most recently is *Meme* (2012). Her poetic style is characterized by its ambiguity. She is resistant to interpretation and says that if she puts into account the reader's ability to understand her poetry, she will censor the emotion that guides her. In *Song for the Spirit of Natalie Going*, the phrases are very ambiguous, because they are not included in complete sentences; they are separated from the rest of the poem by commas and dashes. These phrases denote some meanings; the reader should interpret them to solve the poem. In order to interpret these denoting phrases, the researcher applies Bertrand Russell's 'Denoting Phrases' theory to the poem. Russell believes that a phrase is denoting solely through its form and there are four classes to interpret a phrase in order to understand its sole preposition. These four classes will help interpret the poem's denoting phrases; solve it.

Wheeler was born in Pennsylvania and grew up in Minnesota. She received more than ten awards, prizes and fellowships, among which is Iowa Poetry Prize (Front) for her poetry book *Ledger* (2005) and the most recent is the National Book Award in 2012 for her poetry book *Meme* (2012). Nearly, all her poems appeared in anthologies. She taught in many universities such as the University of Iowa. Currently, she is the director of Creative Writing at Princeton University.

This study aims to analyze Susan Wheeler's *Song for the Spirit of Natalie Going* which is published in her poetry book *Assorted Poems* (2009) with special reference to Bertrand Russell's theory of 'Denoting Phrases' which is published in his article *On Denoting* (Oct. 1905)

Wheeler's *Song for the Spirit of Natalie Going* is chosen for it represents one of the postmodern poems that reflects the most prominent characteristics of Postmodernism: uncertainty, indetermination, imitating traditional forms, and parodying a past poem. Russell's theory of 'Denoting Phrases' is considered the best, to the researcher's knowledge, to help the reader interpret the poem's denoting phrases, because in Wheeler's *Song for the Spirit of Natalie Going* the phrases are more ambiguous, because they are, mostly, not included in complete sentences; they are separated from the rest of the elegy by commas and dashes. In additions, Russell's theory and Wheeler's views about reading a poem have a meeting point, as

it will be clear later on. The researcher believes that Russell's theory will be helpful to interpret the poem's ambiguous phrases and solve the poem.

Many studies handle Susan Wheeler's poetry, Bertrand Russell's *On Denoting* article, and the elegy; however, to the researcher's knowledge, no single study nor a web analysis handles Wheeler's *Song for the Spirit of Natalie Going*. The first is Greg Weiss's *Susan Wheeler's Assorted Poems*, book reviewed (2009). It contains selections from Wheeler's four volumes of poetry—*Bag 'o' Diamonds*, *Smokes*, *Source Codes*, and *Ledger*. The narratives are less talky, very cryptic, and often bring to mind folksongs. Wheeler's *Assorted Poems* is excellent and is the rare volume that exhibits ambition and shows quality. The second is Ankit S. Basnet's *Ekphrasis in some Contemporary American Extended Sequences: Presence, Exteriority, and Form in John Ashbery and Susan Wheeler* (2017). This thesis explores the sequences of John Ashbery and Susan Wheeler to demonstrate the shared sensibility in the changing mode of ekphrasis in contemporary American poetry. The third is Russell Wahl's *'On Denoting' and the Principle of Acquaintance* (2007). Russell's earlier theory of denoting concepts went hand in hand with the principle of acquaintance. This study examines the relation between both. The account of "On Denoting" preserved the connection that the theory had with the principle of acquaintance. The fourth is Imaguire's *Deconstructing "On Denoting"* (2005). It discusses Russell's treatment of definite descriptions in "On Denoting", and argues that although it is successful in achieving an interesting reduction of contexts involving descriptions, it contains important ambiguities.

Postmodernism flourished after World War II till the end of the century. Raman Selden denotes:

The postmodern experience is widely held to stem from a profound sense of... uncertainty... .  
 Art becomes... entropy of meaning... . Postmodernists produce... indeterminate... structures...  
 . The parodic... still critical mode that postmodernist literature can adopt. (199-200)

Both uncertainty and indetermination are among the most prominent features of the postmodern. Both impose a sense of ambiguity that covers the atmosphere of a work of art. Wendy Bishop clarifies that "fragmentation... and stylistic imitation are the techniques of postmodern artists." (132) Fragmentation presents fragmented parts that make incomplete sentences; this imposes a sense of ambiguity. Along with uncertainty and indetermination, the

text will be deeply ambiguous and unclear. This requires a great effort from the reader to interpret its inner meanings. Imitating traditional forms and parodying past texts are among the features that are used by postmodernists.

Bertrand Russell's theory of 'Denoting phrases' is made to help the reader interpret a phrase by discovering its sole preposition that presents its real inner meaning. He published his theory in his article *On Denoting* (Oct. 1905). He states:

By a 'denoting phrase' I mean a phrase such as one of the following: a man... . Thus a phrase is denoting solely in virtue of its form. We may distinguish three cases: (1) A phrase may be denoting, and yet not denoting anything... . (2) A phrase may denote one definite object... . (3) A phrase may denote ambiguously... . Everything, nothing, and something, are not assumed to have any meaning in isolation, but a meaning is assigned to every preposition in which they occur. This is the principle of the theory of denoting I wish to advocate. (479: 480)

Every phrase is supposed to stand for a sole meaning and it is determined by the phrase's form. Every phrase presents a number of prepositions and only one is perfectly true, the one that the writer intends; Russell assigns three classes that classifies the possibilities of these prepositions. In order to make Russell's theory clearer, the examples 'no men,' 'some men,' and 'all men' will be used to stand for 'nothing,' 'something,' and 'everything' respectively. The first class denotes; however, not denoting anything. This happens when the phrase presents a negative fact that denotes nothing. This is clear, for example, when we say 'no men.' Russell calls the negative the 'false' and says: "I use C(x) to mean a preposition... . C (nothing) means 'C(x) is false' is always true... . C(no men) means 'If x is human, then C(x) is false' is always true." (Russell, 480:481) Here, 'C' refers to a preposition; when a preposition is negative, he calls it a false or nothing preposition. Surely, in this case, this negative fact is always true. As a result, 'C(x) is false' is always true. In the second class, a phrase may denote one definite object. This is clear, for example, when we say 'some men.' He says that C (something) means "C(x) is not always false or C(x) is sometimes true... . C (some men) will mean the same as C (a man), and C (a man) means it is false that 'C(x) and x I human' is always false." (Russell, 480) Here, on specific man is referred to and the preposition 'C (a man)' is always true; this fact is not always false and is sometimes true. This means two facts: firstly, it is false to say that 'C (a man)' is always false; secondly, 'C (a man)' is not always false. Each fact depends on the preposition in

which the verbal expression occurs. In the third class, a phrase may denote ambiguously. This is clear, for example, when we say ‘all men.’ He says that C (everything) means: “‘C(x)’ is always true... . ‘C (all men)’ means ‘if x is human, then C(x) is true’ is always true.” (Russell, 481) Here, all men are referred to and the proposition ‘C (all man)’ is always true; this fact is always true. Russell adds a fourth class that is the ‘the’ case which refers specifically: “Now ‘the,’ when it is strictly used, involves uniqueness.” (481) ‘The’ class refers uniquely and the phrase will be clear enough for the reader to interpret. In all these four classes, a phrase does not hold a meaning on its own account; but a meaning is assigned to every preposition in which it occurs.

Russell affirms that a reader will reach the correct preposition by studying two kinds of information: “The distinction between acquaintance and knowledge about is the distinction between the things we have presentation of, and the things we only reach by means of denoting phrases.” (479) When we have background information about the correct preposition we will be guided unambiguously. This is clear when, for example, we are aware of the writer’s interests, emotions or relation to the subject, or of whether the text reflects a real story or not. These kinds of information are classified by Russell as the things that we are acquainted with or we have presentation of. However, the information that we acquire from the denoting phrases he calls the things that we have knowledge about. According to Russell, the reader must use both kinds of information to interpret a denoting phrase and discover its sole preposition; hence solve the text.

To conclude, according to Russell’s theory of ‘Denoting Phrases,’ every phrase will be interpreted according to one of the three classes: a phrase may be denoting, and yet not denoting anything, a phrase may denote one definite object, or a phrase may denote ambiguously. ‘The’ class represents the fourth class; it refers uniquely and its phrase will be clear enough for the reader to interpret. In all these four classes, a phrase does not hold a meaning by itself; but a meaning is assigned to every preposition in which it occurs. Russell distinguishes two kinds of information. Firstly, when we have background information about the text, it will form the things that we are acquainted with and, secondly, when we have information from the denoting phrases, it will form the things that we have knowledge about.

According to Russell, the reader must use both kinds of information to interpret a denoting phrase and discover its sole preposition; solve the text.

This study verifies whether Russell's theory of 'Denoting Phrases' is applicable to and helps solve Wheeler's *Song for the Spirit of Natalie Going* or not. It attempts to apply the theory to and solve the poem.

In order to solve Wheeler's *Song for the Spirit of Natalie Going*, it is proper to determine the main characteristics of her style. As a postmodernist, Wheeler tends to use fragmentations and her poems reflect a sense of uncertainty and indetermination. Her poetry reflects incomplete sentences; this imposes a sense of ellipticity. It is very ambiguous and unclear; this requires a great effort from the reader to interpret its inner meanings. Otherwise, "Wheeler's poetry does not shy from difficulty, complexity and confusion." (Wheeler, ProQuest) Her poetry is difficult and its parts are hard to be interpreted. She, also, uses parody; Lynn Keller states that "like many postmodern writers, she... is fascinated with what can be made using preexistent texts." (573) Sometimes, in her texts, she use some old traditional elements that were used in past texts. H. L. Hix affirms that "a different approach that still foregrounds tradition can be found in Susan Wheeler's work, with its more ironic method of borrowing." (159) She is, deeply, attached to using parody and imitating traditional forms.

Wheeler's style resists interpretation and she clarifies: "If we identify a 'resistant' poem from a reading of the meaning revealed by its visual, syntactic, linguistic and referential aspects... must the individual poet be queried before his text can be read?" (Reading, 151) Wheeler believes that a resistant poem will not be understood by the reader through the deep analysis of its diverse aspects unless its poet is questioned about his poem. If not, the reader will have to attempt to discover the poet's emotions and other clarifying background information about the poem himself. Bishop states that she "bemoans the possibility of successful assimilation... preferring... to remain resistant to interpretation." (132) Wheeler makes her poem resist interpretation; she believes that this is how a poem should be written. In writing a poem, Rebecca Rule and Susan Wheeler advise other beginner poets to "say it short, say it right, say it once, and move on." (223) Her advices show how much she likes to say things briefly, and hates interpreting or redundancy. She does not care much about the reader and says: "In the poem's cross-purposes setup... it has been called... indifferent to its readers."

(Would, 448-449) During the preparation stage of a poem, the poet is completely careless about giving the reader clues that guide him; in this case, the poem will be called indifferent to the reader. This makes things confusing and ambiguous for the reader to understand. Wheeler says: "if we try to be too right in our poems, we censor out the conflicts that guide us." (Laurie, 43) The poet has some inner conflict that leads him to the poem's emotion and if he puts into account the reader's ability to understand that conflict, he will censor or impede his emotion and stream of thoughts. This will corrupt the poet's emotion. In her interview with Robert Polito, Wheeler describes her versification and says: "To any poem... I bring an emotional state... . Then what preoccupations your methods have make their accommodations to the demands of that state." (Polito, 36) In her poem, emotion prevails, ignoring other aspects. The poem requires some accommodations to keep up with that emotion and the poet should perform them. Her poem is complex and confusing and this makes it like a puzzle that needs solving; she clarifies: "Sometimes there's a sudden sense of 'solving' a poem- which has more to do with understanding." (Galway, 119) The reader should solve the poem through understanding its elements of poetry.

To conclude, Wheeler's style is ambiguous. As a postmodernist, Wheeler tends to use fragmentations and her poems reflect a sense of uncertainty and indetermination. Her poetry reflects incomplete sentences; this imposes a sense of ellipticity. Her poem is ambiguous, unclear, and confusing and this makes it like a puzzle that needs solving. According to Wheeler's views about reading a poem the reader must acquire background information about the poem before reading it.

Before solving Wheeler's poem, it is important to spot a meeting point between Russell's theory and Wheeler's views about reading a poem: the reader must acquire background information about the text before reading it. Consequently, in order to solve Wheeler's poem, the reader should get through four stages. Acquiring background information about the poem along with the information from its denoting phrases will form the first two stages that lead to the third stage: interpreting each denoting phrase and discover its sole preposition. The fourth stage is using the denoting phrases' real prepositions in understanding the Wheeler's emotion and discovering *Song for the Spirit of Natalie Going's* elements of poetry; this will help solve the poem. The researcher will try to follow these four stages in order to solve the poem.

Accordingly, the first stage in solving *Song for the Spirit of Natalie Going* is to acquire some background information about the poem before reading it. Some information may be acquired from Wheeler's article which was published in 'Washington Post,' she speaks about the reason for writing the poem:

When friends' infant daughter, Natalie Joy Hertel-Voisine, died... my devastated friends immediately responded, 'write a poem.' I know that for her elegy... it would have to speak to the powerful physicality of a parent's relationship with a young child and, in particular, the goofy, sweet physicality of Natalie's own spirit. (Poet's Choice)

Wheeler responded to her friends' demand to write about the death of their daughter Natalie and *Song for the Spirit of Natalie Going* was the result. In the poem, Wheeler describes two things: the past deep relationship between a parent and Natalie, and her past playful sweet spirit.

Wheeler states that in writing *Song for the Spirit of Natalie Going*, she follows the steps of Stephané Mallarmé's elegy *A Tomb for Anatole*:

I thought of the extraordinary notes by Stephané Mallarmé that make up *A Tomb for Anatole*... . Mallarmé's son Anatole... died at 8 years old, and the fragments... were discontinuous and truncated notes... . Without full sentences, strung on a line of dashes... . So I borrowed, using several lines from Mallarmé's notes as an epigraph and anchor... . Sometimes a poem rides the cattails of another poem to get further than it could have gotten on its own. For me, *A Tomb for Anatole* provided a scaffolding, a syntax, for something that remains unspeakable. (Poet's Choice)

In *Song for the Spirit of Natalie Going*, Wheeler borrowed her style from Mallarmé's elegy *A Tomb for Anatole*; she even took several lines from it. His elegy was meant to mourn his son Anatole's death. It consists of fragments that are discontinuous and chopped into parts, producing incomplete sentences that include many dashes. She believes that in spite of the fact that she took her poem's built-up and syntax from his elegy, her poem will get further than his. Otherwise, a mere imitation of past texts is barren; however, she restores the power of these texts to a new one. As result, her poem is an elegiac parody. To some extent, it is explicable that her ambiguous style owes much to Mallarmé's; consequently, her elegy's fragmentations,



discontinuity, and using incomplete sentences that include many dashes lead to her style's ambiguity.

To conclude, there is a meeting point between Russell's theory and Wheeler's views about reading a poem: the reader must acquire background information about the text before reading it. Consequently, in order to solve Wheeler's poem, the reader should get through four stages. Acquiring background information about the poem along with the information from its denoting phrases will form the first two stages that lead to the third stage: interpreting each denoting phrase and discover its sole preposition. The fourth stage is using the denoting phrases' real prepositions in understanding Wheeler's emotion and discovering *Song for the Spirit of Natalie Going*'s elements of poetry; this will help solve the poem. The researcher will try to follow these four stages in order to solve the poem. There are three main background pieces of information about Wheeler's poem. The first is that Wheeler's poem is made as a reaction to her friends' agony after their daughter Natalie's death. The second is that Wheeler describes two things: the past deep relationship between a parent and Natalie, and her past playful sweet spirit. The third is that her poem's style owes much to Mallarmé's; consequently, its fragmentations, discontinuity, and using incomplete sentences that include many dashes lead to its style's ambiguity.

The second and the third stages in solving Wheeler's *Song for the Spirit of Natalie Going* will be done in each part of the elegy. The elegy does not reflect a continuous narrative and is divided into parts. Stephen Yenser asserts that "her narratives are discontinuous; her juxtapositions are sometimes inexplicable even in retrospect." (Susan) She tends to employ a discontinuous style of writing and inexplicable juxtapositions even in recalling past experiences. Michael Theune affirms the division of her elegy into two sections:

*Song for the Spirit of Natalie Going*, an elegy for an infant, makes its way through a catalogue of brief wonders- 'Spacey, resplendent,/ in seersucker...the big one's delight- to a final, fitting cry: 'Such a sharp love there is! Such a loud/ love... your future in me.' (166)

The elegy is divided into two sections: the first tells us about some past wonders about Natalie and the second describes a parent's current agony of loss that Theune calls 'a final, fitting cry.' In Wheeler's elegy, it is clear that "beyond the highjinks often lies a sense of want and urgency as in the almost joyful memorial to a passing infant in *Song for the Spirit of Natalie Going*."

(American Letters, 225) The elegy reflects Natalie's past playful pranks that she pulled on others and it is followed by a parent's sense of want and urgency. As a matter of fact, the elegy's division into two sections is affirmed by Wheeler's previous statement about what she describes in her elegy. The researcher attempts to determine the beginning and end of both sections: the first section starts from line number one till 'child knees...' in line number thirteen and the second section starts from 'need to have the child/here...' till the end of the elegy. The first section will be handled in two parts.

In the first part of the first section, a parent describes Natalie's sleeping till she woke up in the morning:

Small bundle of bones, small bundle of fingers, of plumpness, of heart,  
 predicate, prescient, standing and wobblings, lit up in the joy,  
 lachrymose GA, your bundle oh KA, the unfolding begun of the start,  
 of the toys, of witnessing, silly, the eyes startled and up, re-  
 enveloped now and fresh with the art, chordate, devoted,  
 sunk in dreaming of wisps and startled awake — This is morning. (Assorted, 52)

The first line reflects two synecdoches: the first is 'small bundle of bones' and the second is 'small bundle of fingers, of plumpness, of heart.' Each synecdoche replaces Natalie's body and affirms the parent's realization of his/her daughter's weakness, smallness, and need of care and protection. The second line describes her body in her bedroom: 'predicate, prescient, standing and wobbling, lit up in the joy.' Her body based on the bed, predicted her future, was standing and swaying, and lit up in merriness. The metaphor in 'lit up in the joy' compares her body to a lamb that lights. This reflects the parent's love and passion; Natalie lit up his/her life. In line number three, the parent called her 'lachrymose GA.' The abbreviation 'GA' may refer to the genetic algorithm in her and this refers to the fact that she inherited lachrymoseness from her parent. The parent called her 'KA;' this abbreviation may refer to the spiritual part of the soul that survived after death. The parent felt sad, because Natalie's body vanished and all that is left is her KA. The parent said that she woke up, 'the eyes startled and up,' and 'the unfolding begun of the start,' seeing things around her such as 'the toys.' Although she, just, woke up, she 'reenveloped now' and had 'sunk in dreaming of wisps.' Again, she 'startled awake- this is morning.' Natalie was sleeping, woke up, slept again, and, eventually, woke up, in the morning.

'Sunk in dreaming' is a metaphor that compares dreaming to water in which one may sink; this reflects her childish fast sleeping and innocence. Wheeler uses some ellipses, for example, in 'begun' and 'sunk.' In each case, 'had' is omitted to shed light on the main verb.

Interpreting the denoting phrases of this part starts by determining them, then, classifying each under one of the four classes of Russell's theory. There are seven denoting phrases: 'small bundle of bones,' 'small bundle of fingers, of plumpness, of heart,' 'the toys,' 'the eyes,' 'the art,' 'chordate,' and 'wisps.' 'Small bundle of bones' means 'some small bundle of bone' and this can be under the second class of the theory: 'a phrase may denote one definite object.' In this case, 'C (something) means C(x) is not always false or C(x) is sometimes true.' The question that needs to be answered is that whose small bundle of bones was it? As long as the elegy mourns Natalie's death, Wheeler describes the physicality of her spirit, and she was an eight years old small-bodied girl, 'small bundle of bones' refers to Natalie's small bundle of bones. Consequently, C (some small bundle of bones) denotes one definite object: Natalie's small bundle of bones. 'Small bundle of fingers, of plumpness, of heart' means 'some small bundle of fingers, of plumpness, of heart' and this can be under the second class of the theory: 'a phrase may denote one definite object.' In this case, 'C (some small bundle of fingers, of plumpness, of heart)' means C(x) is not always false or is sometimes true.' The question that needs to be answered is that whose small bundle of fingers, of plumpness, of heart was it? What is said about 'Small bundle of bones' is applicable here; 'small bundle of fingers, of plumpness, of heart' refers to Natalie's small bundle of fingers, of plumpness, of heart. Consequently, C (some small bundle of bones) denotes one definite object: Natalie's small bundle of fingers, of plumpness, of heart. Understanding that the previous two denoting phrases reflect two synecdoches helps realize the fact that Wheeler uses each denoting phrase to refer to Natalie's body. This helps discover each denoting phrase's sole preposition. 'The toys' can be under the fourth class of the theory: 'the' class refers uniquely. The question that needs to be answered is that whose toys were these? As long as Natalie was eight years old; she was in her bedroom, 'the toys' refers to Natalie's toys. 'The eyes' can be under the fourth class of the theory: 'the' class refers uniquely. The question that needs to be answered is that whose eyes were these? As long as Natalie was spoken about; she was sleeping in her bedroom, 'the eyes' refers to Natalie's eyes. 'The art' can be under the fourth class of the theory: 'the' class refers uniquely.

The question that needs to be answered is that what was that art? As long as Natalie was in her bedroom and there could have been childish drawings that were hanged on its walls, 'the art' refers to Natalie's bedroom's drawings. 'Chordate' means 'some chordate' and this can be under the second class of the theory: 'a phrase may denote one definite object.' In this case, 'C (something) means C(x) is not always false or C(x) is sometimes true.' The question that needs to be answered is that whose chordate was it? As long as Natalie was sleeping in her bedroom and her chordate was bent, 'chordate' refers to Natalie's chordate. Consequently, C (some chordate) denotes one definite object: Natalie's chordate. 'Wisps' means 'some wisps' and this can be under the second class of the theory: 'a phrase may denote one definite object.' In this case, 'C (something) means C(x) is not always false or C(x) is sometimes true.' The question that needs to be answered is that whose wisps were these? As long as Natalie was sleeping in her bedroom and her wisps were seen stranded, 'wisps' refers to Natalie's wisps. Consequently, C (some chordate) denotes one definite object: Natalie's wisps. Understanding that 'sunk in dreaming' reflects a metaphor helps realize the fact that Natalie was sleeping in her bedroom. This fact helps interpret the previous five denoting phrases and discover their correct prepositions.

In this part of the elegy, interpreting the denoting phrases produced some extra untold information. Firstly, the parent was watching Natalie while she was sleeping in her bedroom. Secondly, there were some drawings that were hanged on the bedroom's walls. Thirdly, Natalie's hair was stranded into wisps. Interpreting each denoting phrase depends much on understanding the poetic devices.

In the second part of the first section, the parent describes Natalie's pranks and playful spirit: This is daddy. This is the number eight — spacey, resplendent, in seersucker bib, overalled, astonished, in dazzling fix on the small crawling lights in their spaceship of night and the plug and the cord and the big one's delight, pausing, mezzed by mobile HEH HEH and again, stinging the shopkeepers, the monkeyish mouth, knees, child knees — need to have the child (Assorted, 52) After waking up, the parent told Natalie that 'this is daddy;' consequently, the speaker of the elegy is the father. Natalie was a prankster and used to pull pranks on others; her father was

counting them: 'this is the number eight.' One of her pranks was turning the room lamp's lights on at night; her body was 'resplendent.' Her body gloomed when the light was spotted on her sleeping cloth, 'seersucker bib;' this 'overallled, astonished' her. 'On the small crawling lights in their spaceship of night' reflects two metaphors. The first metaphor compares the lights to snakes that crawl; this affirms Natalie's sneaking abilities. The second metaphor compares the lights to astronauts and the night to their spaceship; this reflects her amusement in performing tricks, imagining cartoony scenes. Another prank was playing with 'the plug and the cord' of the mobile's charger and this caused 'the big one's delight,' the father was delighted. 'The big one' is a monotonous that replaces the father- he may have been the oldest, biggest-bodied, or wisest member of the family. Some of Natalie's other tricks are 'pausing, / mezzed by mobile HEH HEH and again, stinging the shopkeepers.' She used to call and pause, and send missed calls to the shopkeepers many times- surely, using the father's mobile that contains these shopkeepers' numbers. She, also, while she was standing on her knees, used to call them and play with her 'monkeyish mouth,' changing the tone of her voice. There is a metaphor in 'stinging the shopkeepers' that compares Natalie to a snake that stings, using her mouth the same way as a snake does. This reflects the great bothering that she used to cause to the shopkeepers. Michael Robin affirms Wheeler's use of ordinary daily language: "Wheeler has a crush on the vernacular." (469) Her language tends to be vernacular and it is clear in some expressions: 'mezzed' and 'mobile HEH HEH.' Yanser explains that "she likes... neologisms." (Susan) She uses these newly invented expressions that came as reactions to the invention of the cell phone; this adds new expressions to her poetic vernacular language.

Interpreting the denoting phrases of this part starts by determining them, then, classifying each under one of the four classes of Russell's theory. There are eight denoting phrases: 'the number eight,' 'seersucker bib,' 'the small crawling lights,' 'the/plug and the cord,' 'the big one,' 'the shopkeepers,' 'the child knees,' 'the monkeyish mouth.' 'The number eight' can be under the fourth class of the theory: 'the' class refers uniquely. The question that needs to be answered is that to what did number eight refer? As long as, Natalie used to play tricks on others, 'the number eight' refers to the count of Natalie's tricks. 'Seersucker bib' means 'some seersucker bib' and this can be under the second class of the theory: 'a phrase may denote one definite object.' In this case, 'C (something) means C(x) is not always false or C(x) is

sometimes true.' The question that needs to be answered is that whose seersucker bib was it? As long as the father was speaking about Natalie's resplendency in this seersucker bib, 'seersucker bib' refers to Natalie's seersucker bib. Consequently, C (some seersucker bib) denotes one definite object: Natalie's seersucker bib. 'The small crawling lights' can be under the fourth class of the theory: 'the' class refers uniquely. The question that needs to be answered is that what were these crawling lights? As long as Natalie used to play with the room's buttons, 'the small crawling lights' refers to the room lamp's lights. Understanding that 'on the small crawling lights in their spaceship of night' reflects a metaphor helps realize the fact that the lights were produced by the room lamp. This fact helps interpret the denoting phrase and discover its correct prepositions. 'The/plug and the cord' can be under the fourth class of the theory: 'the' class refers uniquely. The question that needs to be answered is that to what electrical device did the plug and cord belong? As long as Natalie used to play with things around her and the father was speaking about the mobile, 'the/plug and the cord' refers to the mobile's charger's plug and cord. 'The big one' can be under the fourth class of the theory: 'the' class refers uniquely. The question that needs to be answered is that who was the big one? As long as the father was speaking about some of Natalie's domestic tricks and he may have been delighted by them, 'the big one' refers to the father. Understanding that the denoting phrase reflects a metonymy helps realize the fact that 'the big one' was the father and this helps interpret the denoting phrase. 'The shopkeepers' can be under the fourth class of the theory: 'the' class refers uniquely. The question that needs to be answered is that who were these shopkeepers? As long as Natalie used to pull mobile pranks on others, 'the shopkeepers' refers to some of Natalie's victims. Understanding that 'stinging the shopkeepers' reflects a metaphor helps realize the fact that Natalie used to pull stinging mobile pranks on the shopkeepers. This fact helps interpret the denoting phrase and discover its correct prepositions. 'The child knees' can be under the fourth class of the theory: 'the' class refers uniquely. The question that needs to be answered is that whose knees were these? As long as the father was speaking about the loss of his eight years old Natalie, 'the child knees' refers to Natalie's knees. 'The monkeyish mouth' can be under the fourth class of the theory: 'the' class refers uniquely. The question that needs to be answered is that whose monkeyish mouth was it? As long as

Natalie used to pull mobile pranks on others and she may have been changing the tone of her voice in order to trick the shopkeepers, ‘the monkeyish mouth’ refers to her mouth.

In this part of the elegy, interpreting the denoting phrases produced some extra untold information. Firstly, in that day, Natalie’s pranks were eight in number. Secondly, the father was delighted by Natalie’s pranks. Thirdly, she used to pull bothering pranks on the shopkeepers, using her father’s mobile. Interpreting each denoting phrase depends much on understanding the poetic devices.

In the second section, the father describes his agony of loss after Natalie’s death:

the monkeyish mouth, knees, child knees — need to have the child  
 here—absence—knees fall—and falling, a dream, a final  
 singsong UH HAH in the starkest of suns, the heat now a blanket  
 now a song of your soul—Such a sharp love there is! Such a loud  
 love there beats! Such a filled hole you leave, in the dusk in the room,  
 in the wobbling hours of what has refuged, your future in me.(Assorted, 52)

The father discovers that the previous scenes of Natalie’s actions were inside ‘a dream;’ this was just ‘a final/singsong.’ This sudden fact arouses his emotions and, now, he ‘need to have the child/ here-absence.’ It causes his shocking heart-burn and his ‘knees fall-and falling.’ There is a repetition in ‘fall- and falling’ that affirms the father’s sudden shocking realization and disappointment. ‘A final/ singsong’ reflects a metonymy that replaces recalling Natalie in the father’s dream; this reflects the father’s long for her. Natalie used to provide the father with the warmth of love and her ‘absence’ made ‘the heat now a blanket/ now a song of your soul.’ Otherwise, there are, only, two sources of warmth that are a blanket and recalling Natalie in a dream. There is a repetition in ‘now a blanket/ now’ that asserts the father’s current long for Natalie’s warmth of love. There is a metaphor in ‘the heat now a blanket’ that compares the heat to a blanket is providing warmth. This assures the father’s long for Natalie. There is a metaphor in ‘a song of your soul’ that compares Natalie’s soul to a singer that sings. This metaphor reflects his long for her. There are three metaphors in ‘such a sharp love there is! such a loud/ love there beats! such a filled hole you leave.’ The first compares her love to a knife that is sharp. The second compares her love to a music that beats. The third compares the dusk, the room and the wobbling hours to grounds that may have holes that may be filled. The three

metaphors reflect some facts: Natalie's memory hurts the father, he is unable to forget her warmth of love, and she left much unfilled space in his life. There is a metaphor in 'wobbling hours' that compares the hours to the branches of a tree that fluctuate. This affirms the fact that her love hurts him from time to time with intervals. Eventually, the father admits the fact that the only thing that is left of her is her memory and her future will, only, be in his recalling her in a dream.

Interpreting the denoting phrases of this part starts by determining them, then, classifying each under one of the four classes of Russell's theory. There are eight denoting phrases: 'the child,' 'a dream,' 'a final/ singsong,' 'the heat,' 'a sharp love,' 'a loud/ love,' 'a filled hole,' and 'the wobbling hours.' 'The child' can be under the fourth class of the theory: 'the' class refers uniquely. The question that needs to be answered is that who is the child? As long as the father shows his long for Natalie, 'the child' refers to Natalie. 'A dream' means 'some dream' and this can be under the second class of the theory: 'a phrase may denote one definite object.' In this case, 'C (something) means C(x) is not always false or C(x) is sometimes true.' The question that needs to be answered is that whose dream was it? As long as Wheeler is speaking about Natalie's past relationship with her father and a dream about her may describe her past actions, 'a dream' refers to the father's dream. Consequently, C (some dream) denotes one definite object: the father's dream. 'A final/ singsong' means 'some final singsong and this can be under the second class of the theory: 'a phrase may denote one definite object.' In this case, 'C (something) means C(x) is not always false or C(x) is sometimes true.' The question that needs to be answered is that what is the final singsong? As long as 'a final/ singsong' reflects a metonymy that replaces recalling Natalie in the father's dream, 'a final/ singsong' refers to recalling Natalie in the father's dream. Consequently, C (some final singsong) denotes one definite object: recalling Natalie in the father's dream. Understanding that 'a final/ singsong' reflects a metonymy helps realize the fact that it refers to recalling Natalie in the father's dream and this helps interpret the denoting phrase. 'The heat' can be under the fourth class of the theory: 'the' class refers uniquely. The question that needs to be answered is that what is that heat? As long as, 'the heat... now a song of your soul' reflects a metaphor that compares her soul to a singer that sings and 'a final/ singsong' reflects a metonymy that replaces recalling Natalie in the father's dream, 'the heat' refers to Natalie's warmth of love. Understanding that



‘the heat... now a song of your soul’ reflects a metaphor and ‘a final/ singsong’ reflects a metonymy helps realize the fact that the heat refers to Natalie’s warmth of love and this helps interpret the denoting phrase. ‘A sharp love’ means ‘some sharp love’ and this can be under the second class of the theory: ‘a phrase may denote one definite object.’ In this case, ‘C (something) means C(x) is not always false or C(x) is sometimes true.’ The question that needs to be answered is that whose sharp love is it? As long as ‘a sharp love’ reflects a metaphor that compares Natalie’s love to a knife that is sharp, ‘a sharp love’ refers to Natalie’s sharp love. Consequently, C (some sharp love) denotes one definite object: Natalie’s sharp love. Understanding that ‘a sharp love’ reflects a metaphor helps realize the fact that the sharp love is Natalie’s love and this helps interpret the denoting phrase. ‘A loud/ love’ means ‘some loud love’ and this can be under the second class of the theory: ‘a phrase may denote one definite object.’ In this case, ‘C (something) means C(x) is not always false or C(x) is sometimes true.’ The question that needs to be answered is that whose loud love is it? As long as ‘a loud/ love’ reflects a metaphor that compares Natalie’s love to a music that beats, ‘a loud/ love’ refers to Natalie’s loud love. Consequently, C (some loud love) denotes one definite object: Natalie’s loud love. Understanding that ‘a loud/ love’ reflects a metaphor helps realize the fact that the loud love is Natalie’s love and this helps interpret the denoting phrase. ‘A filled hole’ means ‘some filled hole’ and this can be under the second class of the theory: ‘a phrase may denote one definite object.’ In this case, ‘C (something) means C(x) is not always false or C(x) is sometimes true.’ The question that needs to be answered is that what is the filled hole? As long as ‘a filled hole’ reflects a metaphor that compares the dusk, the room and the wobbling hours to grounds that may have holes that may be filled, ‘a filled hole’ refers to the hole that Natalie filled in her father’s life before her death. Consequently, C (some filled hole) denotes one definite object: the hole that Natalie filled in her father’s life before her death. Understanding that ‘a filled hole’ reflects a metaphor helps realize the fact that the filled hole is the hole that Natalie filled in her father’s life before her death and this helps interpret the denoting phrase. ‘The wobbling hours’ can be under the fourth class of the theory: ‘the’ class refers uniquely. The question that needs to be answered is that what are the wobbling hours? As long as, ‘such a filled hole you leave... in the wobbling hours’ reflects a metaphor that compares the wobbling hours to grounds that may have holes that can be filled, and ‘wobbling hours’ reflects a

metaphor that compares the hours to the branches of a tree that fluctuate, 'the wobbling hours' refers to the times when Natalie's love hurts the father from time to time with intervals. Understanding that 'wobbling hours' reflects a metaphor helps realize the fact that the wobbling refers to the times when her love hurts the father from time to time with intervals and this helps interpret the denoting phrase.

In this part of the elegy, interpreting the denoting phrases produced some extra untold information. Firstly, the father expresses his longing for Natalie. Secondly, all what is said about Natalie's past physicality was the father's dream. Thirdly, the father, deeply, longs for Natalie's warmth of love. Fourthly, recalling Natalie's love hurts her father. Interpreting each denoting phrase depends much on understanding the poetic devices.

In Wheeler's *Song for the Spirit of Natalie Going*, interpreting the denoting phrases, produced some extra untold information. Firstly, in the father's dream, he was watching Natalie while she was sleeping in her bedroom. Secondly, there were some drawings hanged on the bedroom's walls. Thirdly, Natalie's hair was stranded into wisps. Fourthly, Natalie used to play tricks on others and these tricks were eight in number. Fifthly, the father was delighted by Natalie's tricks. Sixthly, she used to bother the shopkeepers by mobile pranks. Seventhly, after waking up and discovering that all what he saw about Natalie was a dream, the father expresses his shock, disappointment and long for her warmth of love. Eighthly, recalling Natalie, deeply, hurts the father. The extra untold information will help the researcher do the fourth stage in solving *Song for the Spirit of Natalie Going* that is using the denoting phrases' real prepositions in understanding Wheeler's emotion and discovering its elements of poetry. The title, *Song for the Spirit of Natalie Going*, becomes more explicable. It refers to a song that is dedicated for Natalie's spirit; the word 'going' refers to the past physical actions of her spirit, when she was alive. The setting refers to Natalie's bedroom and home before and after her death. The speaker of the elegy is Natalie's father. The theme of the poem reflects some universal ideas, for example, a dead daughter's love will never be forgotten by her father. In the elegy, there are two images: the image of the past physicality of Natalie's spirit and the image of a devastated father after her death. The tone is sad, mourning and loving. The extra untold information helps the researcher do the fourth stage in solving the *Song for the Spirit of Natalie Going* that is understanding Wheeler's emotion and discovering the elegy's elements of poetry; hence, solve

it. Solving the elegy affirms the fact that Russell's theory of 'Denoting Phrases' is applicable to it and is helpful in interpreting its denoting phrases.

After deep analysis, the researcher, firstly, believes that, in a prose text, interpreting a denoting phrase requires following Russell's first two stages; however, in poetry, it requires an additional stage that is understanding the poetic devices. Secondly, the researcher believes that when a denoting phrase demonstrates a metonymy or a synecdoche, it will be, directly, explicable. Thirdly, in Wheeler's *Song for the Spirit of Natalie Going*, the researcher believes that the denoting phrases are more ambiguous, because they are, mostly, not included in complete sentences; they are separated from the rest of the elegy by commas and dashes. This ellipticity makes the information that the reader acquires from the denoting phrases limited. As a result, the reader's inability to understand the elegy's poetic devices will endanger interpreting the denoting phrases. Consequently, the researcher reaches a very clear cut conclusion that is understanding the poetic devices is indispensable to interpret *Song for the Spirit of Natalie Going's* denoting phrases.

To conclude, in Wheeler's *Song for the Spirit of Natalie Going*, interpreting the denoting phrases produced some extra untold information. Interpreting each denoting phrase depended much on understanding the poetic devices. The extra untold information helps the researcher do the fourth stage in solving the *Song for the Spirit of Natalie Going* that is understanding Wheeler's emotion and discovering the elegy's elements of poetry; hence, solve it. Solving the elegy affirms the fact that Russell's theory of 'Denoting Phrases' is applicable to it and is helpful in interpreting its denoting phrases. After deep analysis, the researcher, firstly, believes that, in a prose text, interpreting a denoting phrase requires following Russell's first two stages; however, in poetry, it requires an additional stage that is understanding the poetic devices. Secondly, the researcher believes that when a denoting phrase demonstrates a metonymy or a synecdoche, it will be, directly, explicable. Thirdly, the researcher reaches a very clear cut conclusion that is understanding the poetic devices is indispensable to interpret *Song for the Spirit of Natalie Going's* denoting phrases.

In conclusion, according to Russell's theory of 'Denoting Phrases,' every phrase will be interpreted according to one of the three classes: a phrase may be denoting, and yet not denoting anything, a phrase may denote one definite object, or a phrase may denote

ambiguously. 'The' class represents the fourth class; it refers uniquely and its phrase will be clear enough for the reader to interpret. In all these four classes, a phrase does not hold a meaning by itself; but a meaning is assigned to every preposition in which it occurs. Russell distinguishes two kinds of information. Firstly, when we have background information about the text, it will form the things that we are acquainted with and, secondly, when we have information from the denoting phrases, it will form the things that we have knowledge about. According to Russell, the reader must use both kinds of information to interpret a denoting phrase and discover its sole preposition; solve the text. Wheeler's style is ambiguous. As a postmodernist, Wheeler tends to use fragmentations and her poems reflect a sense of uncertainty and indetermination. Her poetry reflects incomplete sentences; this imposes a sense of ellipticity. Her poem is ambiguous, unclear, and confusing and this makes it like a puzzle that needs solving. According to Wheeler's views about reading a poem the reader must acquire background information about the poem before reading it. There is a meeting point between Russell's theory and Wheeler's views about reading a poem: the reader must acquire background information about the text before reading it. Consequently, in order to solve Wheeler's poem, the reader should get through four stages. Acquiring background information about the poem along with the information from its denoting phrases will form the first two stages that lead to the third stage: interpreting each denoting phrase and discover its sole preposition. The fourth stage is using the denoting phrases' real prepositions in understanding the poet's emotion and discovering *Song for the Spirit of Natalie Going's* elements of poetry; this will help solve the poem. The researcher will try to follow these four stages in order to solve the poem. There are three main background pieces of information about Wheeler's poem. The first is that Wheeler's poem is made as a reaction to her friends' agony after their daughter Natalie's death. The second is that Wheeler describes two things: the past deep relationship between a parent and Natalie, and her past playful sweet spirit. The third is that her style owes much to Mallarmé's; consequently, her poem is an elegiac parody; its fragmentations, discontinuity, and using incomplete sentences that include many dashes lead to her style ambiguity. In Wheeler's *Song for the Spirit of Natalie Going*, interpreting the denoting phrases produced some extra untold information. Interpreting each denoting phrase depended much on understanding the poetic devices. The extra untold information will help the researcher do the

fourth stage in solving *Song for the Spirit of Natalie Going* that is using the denoting phrases' real prepositions in understanding Wheeler's emotion and discovering the elegy's elements of poetry; hence, solve it. Solving the elegy affirms the fact that Russell's theory of 'Denoting Phrases' is applicable to it and is helpful in interpreting its denoting phrases. After deep analysis, the researcher, firstly, believes that, in a prose text, interpreting a denoting phrase requires following Russell's first two stages; however, in poetry, it requires an additional stage that is understanding the poetic devices. Secondly, the researcher believes that when a denoting phrase demonstrates a metonymy or a synecdoche, it will be, directly, explicable. Thirdly, the researcher reaches a very clear cut conclusion that is understanding the poetic devices is indispensable to interpret *Song for the Spirit of Natalie Going's* denoting phrases. It is hoped that this study widens the scope of research and helps future studies. It is recommended for any student of Wheeler's poetry to get acquainted with the current study in order to be able to understand its elements of poetry properly.

## المستخلص

### عبارات موضحة في قصيدة "أغنية مستمرة لروح ناتالي" لسوزان ويلر محمود سروة

تتميز الشاعرة الأمريكية سوزان ويلر (1955-) بجزارة إنتاجها فلقد نشرت ستة مجموعات شعرية وأكثرها حداثة ميمي (2012). يتميز أسلوبها الشعري بالتعقيد. فهي تقاوم التفسير وتعبر عن ذلك بقولها أنها لو وضعت بعين الاعتبار قدرة القارئ على تفسير شعرها فإنها ستراقب المشاعر التي ترشدها. ونجد أن العبارات في "أغنية مستمرة لروح ناتالي" شديدة التعقيد وذلك بسبب أنهم ليسوا أجزاء من جمل ولكن كل عبارة منفصلة عن باقي القصيدة بفواصل أو شرطيات. وتوضح تلك العبارات معاني ويجب على القاري تفسيرها لكي يحل القصيدة. ويطبق الباحث نظرية "العبارات الموضحة" لبرتراند راسل على القصيدة. ويعتقد راسل أن العبارة توضح فقط من خلال شكلها وأنة يوجد أربعة فئات لتفسير العبارة من اجل فهم فرضيتها الوحيدة. وستساعد الأربعة فئات على تفسير العبارات الموضحة وكذلك علي حل القصيدة. وستثبت هذه الدراسة أن نظرية راسل قابلة للتطبيق على القصيدة وتساعد بشكل كبير على حلها.

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