The structure of every sentence is a lesson in logic
Mill, *Inaugural Address* 30

The Lucy poems figure in little a variety of problems about poetic representation and naming
Ferguson 532-533

I was being a little playful with the title of this talk, but not much. “Notes and Queries” really is the genre, though for accuracy’s sake I should have reversed the order. All I want to do is to raise some questions about a very familiar poem and then show you some resources and lines of thought that speak to those questions. This research isn’t in aid of devising and defending a new reading of a particular text—in this case, Wordsworth’s *She dwelt among th’ untrodden ways*, second in the standard sequencing of the Lucy poems. What excites me is the way that this poem’s resistances to reading—obvious and much remarked—open onto analytic models that are not often part of our critical repertoire in general (meaning, among students of literature), or that are unlikely for readers of Wordsworth. Shifting, enlarging, refining our understanding of a single work—if that happens, it would be a bonus. The aim, however, is to experiment with new ways of responding to language patterns that are important in Wordsworth’s poetry and, by extension, other poetries of the modern periods, and to discover new things to do with those patterns.

My research has pulled me in a few directions; the first, cited in the second half of my title (“Names and Numbers”), is toward formal-language theory—sometimes called philosophy of reference. I say *pulled* because I certainly didn’t choose that path. It’s arid and thorny and makes our formalism look like a walk in the park. But there it was, coming out of the process of asking very basic, small-scale, and un-coordinated usage questions and following leads that seemed promising for each question individually. I’ll retrace the trodden way, leaving in the false starts and dead-ends. I do that—and I want you to hear that I’m doing it—for two reasons. One is that the sources I’ve been looking at are new to me and I think they might have their own independent interest for you. Second, though some of these paths run at a tangent to my through-line, I haven’t ruled out their relevance. And I’m hoping that when I finish, we can point out things I’ve missed and maybe help me to integrate some of the outlying parts.

Not to make a mystery, I’ve been reading in John Stuart Mill’s *System of Logic*, 1843, and in Gottlob Frege, both the *Foundations of Arithmetical* and *On Sense and Reference*, 1884 and 1892. Both philosophers describe what
they make to be the logical structure of proper names; they also describe the logical structure of numbers. Each writer’s treatment of the two includes rationalist and empiricist elements; neither Mill nor Frege reflects on this mixture and I’m not yet able to articulate the logical necessity of these cross-currents. The independent interest I find in these treatises of concern ways to think about poetry and grammar that seem new for Romantic studies. I borrow the phrase *poetry and grammar* from Gertrude Stein’s lecture by that title, a work that to my complete surprise emerged as one of my anime Marques to reflection. I turned to Stein because, strange as it sounds, hers was the one corpus showing clear affinities with the usages that interested me in Wordsworth. The eureka moment came when I happened on an article by Jennifer Ashton, a wonderfully clarifying commentary, which had the added attraction of confirming my hunch that ordinary language philosophy could speak to the language patterns I’d found in Wordsworth. Without Ashton’s reading of Stein, I wouldn’t have known how to use my own readings in reference theory to open up the poetry. So, huge thanks to her, and a plug for the book in which that article forms the second chapter, *From Modernism to Postmodernism: American Poetry and Theory in the Twentieth Century*. Let me also give credit to one of my graduate students, Rebecca Porte, who put me onto Ashton’s work and is now writing about twentieth-century poetry and the genre of thought-experiment in the period’s philosophical and scientific discourse. And to Anahid Nersessian, who kindled to my interest in analytic philosophy and sent me two wonderful articles as well as her thoughts on the topic, many more thanks. I’m sure you’ve forgotten my aids to reflection by now, so here’s the list again. Mill, Frege, and Stein.

First, I’d remark a certain resemblance to the form of the riddle, the sort of thing we find in Stevens’ anecdote poems (i.e., when is a jar not a jar? or, what is round upon the ground?). Or, when is a girl not a girl? When she’s Lucy. Third, I’d remark a certain resemblance to the form of the riddle, the sort of thing we find in Stevens’ anecdote poems (i.e., when is a jar not a jar? or, what is round upon the ground?). Or, when is a girl not a girl? When she’s Lucy. One last preliminary. The Lucy poems have a long and illustrious critical history. I’ll honor just one reading in this talk, Frances Ferguson’s “Wordsworth’s Quest for a Poetic Object” (1973), because I see it as normative both for *She dwelt* and for the Lucy poems overall. I mean *normative* in the strict sense, i.e., a best-practice standard. Ferguson organizes the poems as “a quest in which the adequacy of poetic language depends precisely upon the poet’s renunciation of any claims to appropriate the object of his poems” (536). On this reading, Lucy is the ever elusive object of desire at once brought into being by writing and forever deferred by it (do hear the rhyme in “lucey lusive”). By tracking the paradoxes of writing and difference, Ferguson for the first time in the poems’ critical history explained their mixed genre: elegy and blazon, with “the speaker…trying to describe an object of love, when that love is compounded of nothing but absence” (540, emphasis Ferguson’s). My interest in *She dwelt* comes as an extension to Ferguson’s reading or a burrowing into one corner of it. She takes on “a variety of problems about poetic representation and naming” (532-533) whereas I look only at number representation and at grammatically specific kinds of naming. The textual bridge carrying me from number to name has three planks: 1) what I take to be an allusion to Gray’s *Elegy Written in a Country Church Yard*; 2) the appositional structure of the first long sentence; and 3) the foregrounding of ordinary pronouns, so-called determiner pronouns (like *none* and *few*), and proper names.

Second, the bareness of the poem—borrowing a phrase from the Emily Dickinson scholarship, its “inhuman lyricism”—done to me in our talk by Jennifer Ashton, a wonderfully clarifying commentary, which had the added attraction of confirming my hunch that ordinary language philosophy could speak to the language patterns I’d found in Wordsworth. Without Ashton’s reading of Stein, I wouldn’t have known how to use my own readings in reference theory to open up the poetry. So, huge thanks to her, and a plug for the book in which that article forms the second chapter, *From Modernism to Postmodernism: American Poetry and Theory in the Twentieth Century*. Let me also give credit to one of my graduate students, Rebecca Porte, who put me onto Ashton’s work and is now writing about twentieth-century poetry and the genre of thought-experiment in the period’s philosophical and scientific discourse. And to Anahid Nersessian, who kindled to my interest in analytic philosophy and sent me two wonderful articles as well as her thoughts on the topic, many more thanks. I’m sure you’ve forgotten my aids to reflection by now, so here’s the list again. Mill, Frege, and Stein.

First of my queries: the obvious logical contradiction lodged in the two *none/few* usages, their illogic underscored by the oxymoron of “untrodden ways.” By shifting this illogic from grammatology (the domain of desire, *différance*, and *disparity*) to the context of analytic philosophy’s treatments of number and name, we might arrive at a new place. The bareness of the poem—borrowing a phrase from the Emily Dickinson scholarship, its “inhuman lyricism”—done to me in our talk by Jennifer Ashton, a wonderfully clarifying commentary, which had the added attraction of confirming my hunch that ordinary language philosophy could speak to the language patterns I’d found in Wordsworth. Without Ashton’s reading of Stein, I wouldn’t have known how to use my own readings in reference theory to open up the poetry. So, huge thanks to her, and a plug for the book in which that article forms the second chapter, *From Modernism to Postmodernism: American Poetry and Theory in the Twentieth Century*. Let me also give credit to one of my graduate students, Rebecca Porte, who put me onto Ashton’s work and is now writing about twentieth-century poetry and the genre of thought-experiment in the period’s philosophical and scientific discourse. And to Anahid Nersessian, who kindled to my interest in analytic philosophy and sent me two wonderful articles as well as her thoughts on the topic, many more thanks. I’m sure you’ve forgotten my aids to reflection by now, so here’s the list again. Mill, Frege, and Stein.

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9. That’s what zero shows. What it does is allow for a process called “recursive abstraction,” a formalizing mechanism. Zero marks the spot where a network of relations among things (say, things 1-10) gets formalized as a sign of those relations—the sign and its value necessarily located outside the network that it represents. At that higher level and supported by that value-sign, another system of relations comes into being (things 10-20, for instance). And so on and so forth (Kaplan, 9, 16, 22, 36, 76, 90, 115). Although this maps generally onto our schemas for meta-narrative, meta-poetics, and reflexivity in general, we might learn something by exploring the similarities and differences between our own critical constructs on the one hand, and the boot-strapping, formalizing processes by which math rises from the study of quantities to the study of relations. But I want to get to the other and, to me, more interesting figure organizing She dwelt—the number one.
To get a leg up on its workings in this poem, I’ll recap the classic scene of instruction in Wordsworth, using Nutting as my example (and it may be germane that Nutting dates from the same compositional place and time as She dwelt, written in Goslar, 1798; in other words, one could imagine Wordsworth conducting two different experiments with the singular). Here’s Nutting: “It seems a day, / (I speak of one from many singled out).” So opens the poem’s mock-epic struggle over signification: _agon_ between being and meaning, process and event, the _One as plenum_ and the numerical _one_—“from many singled out.” The poem stages the fertile but fatal attraction of the singular as the violence and narcissism of desire, troped as sexual aggression and moralized through the closing admonition to the maiden. By “violence and narcissism,” I mean the deep-structure drive of the poem toward a fusion of ego and object into a single speaking, a _one_ of poetic power to take the place of an original wholeness, abandoned or back-projected in the interest of achieving freedom and mastery. Wordsworth’s characteristic recoil from that hypostatized _one_ and his repertoire of strategies for remedial follow-up are by now staples of the criticism.

I see a different kind of _one_ surfacing in _She dwelt_, and it does so on the back of Gray’s _Elegy_. The poems are linked through their flower tropes—conventional in Gray, intentional, I believe, in Wordsworth. Here’s Gray’s metaphor for the class or type of the rustic beauty: “Full many a flower . . . born to blush unseen, / And waste its sweetness on the desert air.” In _She dwelt_, those many flowers fine down to a _flower_ particularized (“hopelessly over-particularized,” writes Ferguson [541]) not just by name but circumstantially: “A Violet by a mossy Stone / Half-hidden from the Eye!” For me, that excess of detail calls up the _Elegy_—a mossy head-stone, perhaps, in a country churchyard, marking the grave of one Lucy . . . Gray? Read against the high-cultural inter-text of Gray’s _Elegy_ rather than through the ballad tradition, where it’s usually situated, _She dwelt_ starts looking like a companion piece to the _Elegy_’s closing epitaph: that one, for a melancholy youth, “to Fortune and to Fame unknown”—Wordsworth’s, for one of Gray’s flower girls. That her sweetness be not entirely wasted, he confers “the passing tribute of a sigh”: to wit, “and, oh! / The difference to me.”

The _Elegy_ doesn’t just deploy general ideas and categorical kinds; it raises reference—naming and numbering—to a thematic level. One thinks first of the famous conversions of proper names into natural-kind names (“some” Milton, Cromwell, village Hampden), but once you start down this path, the workings of the nominative jump out at you: collective nouns, general nouns, concept names, count- and non-count nouns, definite/indefinite /and quantifier pronouns, emblems, personifications, determiners, and deictics—a veritable riot of naming. Moreover, as if to do in a dramatic register what happens in the philosophical, line 93 launches the _Elegy_’s notorious narrational pile-up, wherein pronouns cut loose from their antecedents, taking on an autonomy that multiplies reference rather than anchoring it. I’m referring to the cast of characters who suddenly start drifting in and out of each other’s frames of reference: rustic moralist, hoary-headed swain, melancholy poet, “thou” who “canst read,” unmarked over-voice, etc.

Putting Wordsworth alongside Gray’s quintessential mid-century elegy highlights the singularizing agenda of _She dwelt_ and its late-century shift from types to individuals. The shift is from exemplarity—understood as the rationally derived _one_—to singularity, which we _could_ call a numerical _one_ but only under a concept of number that is non-additive and in that respect (maybe others too) analogous to the proper name. Both belong to the grammatical category of non-count nouns. This is what I’ll try to get at below: the structure of a singularity to which Johnson’s famous jibe about the Metaphysical poets—that they “number the streaks of the tulip”—would not apply. Also, and in light of the fact that the name, _Lucy_, is itself a “neo-Arcadian commonplace, an eighteenth-century elegiac fixture” (as I only recently learned; Hartman 141), I think you could make an even stronger claim: namely, that the Lucy poems intend this shift from exemplarity to singularity as part of their operating program. One might even suggest that this agenda is our best rationale for grouping them.

Another effect of the Gray resonance is to highlight the difference between the singularizing action of _She dwelt_ and what happens in _Nutting_, the spots of time, and other defining Wordsworthian moments. Desire powers those struggles between the mind of man and nature, ensuring reciprocal individuation of subject and object by poem’s or passage’s end. _She dwelt_, its erotic dynamics tempered by elegy, suspends that shaping spirit. And, while it brings forth a _one_ remained by the labor of _ascesis_ (this, on the standard view of the poem), the allusion to Gray suggests a _one_ arising from a trio of naming functions: namely, apposition, pronominal substitution, and the proper name.

Roger Slakey, in an excellent essay from 1972, unpacks the logic of apposition both in general and in _She_
the Dickinson poem. (In this spirit, Slakey titles his essay “At Zero,” referencing the famous last line of Dickinson’s 

16. Slakey quotes a grammarian, J. E. Conner: “in an appositive construction, the two apposed elements are [not additive but] identical in the sense that one is a substitute for the other” (631). [2] I agree that the elements are not additive, but substitution doesn’t seem right either, or not for this poem. That’s because substitution seems to privilege one name or phrase—conventionally the first—over the others which stand in for it. She dwelt shows no such hierarchy. At the same time, however, the “halved” violet and the star’s solitude are skewed analogs, not interchangeable epithets. (Logically, it should have been either half a star, the other half obscured by cloud or some such thing; or, a lone violet.) So, if it’s not 1-plus-1 (violet+star etc), and not 1-or-1 (either/or, that is), then maybe Wordsworth’s appositives code for 1-and-1. She and maid and violet and star and Lucy. If that’s how it works, then we have to press on for the kind of identity obtaining among items in an appositive construction. Simply put, what does and mean if it doesn’t mean plus?

17. The easiest answer is that the elements are identical in the sense that a pronoun is identical to the noun it references. I think that’s unlikely, though, not just due to the slippage between half a violet and solitary star, but because the in-your-face self-contradictory usage of quantifier pronouns in She dwelt (none and few; un-known/few could know) complicates what should be a direct mapping of pronoun onto noun. Could we say then that both pronouns and appositives have the same kind of identity with their object (and the same relation to each other) that we get between two proper names for the same referent? Let’s see.

18. The textbook example of that is Phosphorus (morning star) and Hesperus (evening star), different names for the planet Venus. The example isn’t as random as it sounds: “Fair as a star when only one / Is shining in the sky!” Readers often see this as alluding to Venus in her two presentations and they use it to explore what kind of object Lucy is. I’d like to get at what kind of name Lucy is: or what it is that this particular poem means (in the sense of picks out) when it says Lucy. How does that relate to what’s picked out by she, maid, violet, and star? And, what light does that throw on the structure and workings of singularity in this poem, especially as compared to others by Wordsworth?

19. In analytic philosophy, the Hesperus/Phosphorus example is closely linked to Frege’s essay On Sense and Reference, which defines each of those names as a “mode of presentation,” “definite description,” or “sense” of a shared referent, the planet, Venus. Each sense is said to express its object, the expression carrying descriptive value. If this were not the case, saying “Hesperus is Venus” would be a meaningless identity statement (like, “x is x”). The reason the statement is informative is of course that the terms are not interchangeable. You can’t say, “I saw Hesperus this morning”; or you could, but you would be wrong. And the fact that you would be wrong means not just that sense is informative but that it’s public and shareable, not a subjective idea about which we might disagree. All proper names are said to have senses but they need not have referents: Pegasus is Frege’s example. In such cases, we “stipulate” a referent (e.g., let Pegasus be the winged horse) and this becomes the de facto meaning of that presentational mode. We do this—stipulate reference—so as to “anchor [reference] amidst the transitory currents of sense” (Ashton 82) lest it become indeterminate. And of course, those of us who read, write, or write about fictions do this more, and also more self-consciously than other people.

20. Frege’s descriptivist account tallies with our ordinary language use. Applied to Wordsworth’s poem, it smooths out the attribution difference between violet and star. The half-hidden violet is determined by its visual incompleteness, the star by its solitude. Frege’s sense/meaning dyad turns this asymmetry into a simple analogy. The flower is specified by its spatial partiality, the star by its temporal partiality. Both senses reference Lucy, setting a clear agenda for the poetic eye, namely, to half-complete what it half-perceives, and by that action, to realize itself as well as its object.

21. And yet, that schema—so satisfying for so many Wordsworth poems—feels stylistically off for She dwelt, whose “mysterious object” seems located in “the imageless realm of the supra-human” (Ferguson 541), the realm of the Dickinson poem. (In this spirit, Slakey titles his essay “At Zero,” referencing the famous last line of Dickinson’s A
There is that about the naming in *She dwelt* which seems better served by Mill’s theory of names, the model against which Frege pushes. On Mill’s account, proper names are concrete but not connotative. “[M]erely distinguishing marks, [they are] given perhaps originally for a reason, but, when once given, [are] independent of it” (Stebbing 5). Thus conceived, proper names have no descriptive content; their meaning, as it were, is exhausted by their referent, just as the meaning of a label is simply the object to which it attaches—a case of direct reference, so-called. (Russell’s notion of direct reference is so strict that he limits proper names to those where the referent is present either through acquaintance [personal experience] or ostentation [showing, deictic). In other words, the only two bona fide proper names are *I* and *this*. Everything else is a descriptive phrase in disguise.) Anyway, that kind of directness—Mill’s kind, or something like it, wherein the referent is entailed by the name, or intrinsic to rather than indexed by or related to it—is, I believe, a common experience of this Lucy poem. And arguably the others as well; perhaps another reason we call them “the Lucy poems” when there are excellent reasons—bibliographic, textual, and biographical—not to. [3]

22. Frege’s number theory adds another facet to the thinking of name in *She dwelt* and to the thinking of *one* or the “singling out” process peculiar to this poem and perhaps others in the sequence. Here again, Frege pushes against Mill, this time, however, with Frege taking the idealist position against Mill’s empiricism. “Each of the numbers...,” writes Mill, “denotes physical phenomena, and connotes a physical property of those phenomena. Two, for instance, denotes all pairs of things, . . . connoting what makes them pairs.... What, then, is that which is connoted by a name of number? Of course some property belonging to the agglomeration of things which we call by the name; and that property is, the characteristic manner in which the agglomeration is made up of, and may be separated into, parts” (System of Logic 164-165). Mill’s “characteristic manner” of composition (and thus his empiricist theory of number) is easily challenged. Here’s Frege: “Mill is, of course, quite right that two apples are physically different from three apples.... But are we to infer from this that their twoness or threeness is something physical?” ([Foundations] 32-33). He parries Mill by noting, “one pair of boots may be the same visible and tangible phenomenon as two boots” (33). He then tries on another theory: if not an abstraction from observed collections, maybe number results from the annexing of thing to thing. But how to define thing or unit in the first place? He ventures another hypothesis: maybe a unit is such by virtue of the condition of being “self-contained and incapable of dissection” (43). But is there really anything that’s incapable of dissection; aren’t all units in theory, anyway, infinitely divisible and/or overlapping? And a more cogent objection, I should think, is that if we didn’t already recognize what a unit is, how could we tell if it was isolated or undivided—as it were, a star or a violet?

23. Frege has us where he wants us, at the weak spot in both descriptive and psychological number theories: his last nail in the coffin is that “none of these can serve as a criterion for what we express by the word ‘one’” (58); “What will not work with 0 and 1 cannot be essential to the concept of number” (57).

24. To get at that—the special cases of *zero* and *one*—Frege recasts the definitional exercise itself. Instead of asking what kind of thing number is, he asks what we mean when we use it. “When we make a statement of number, what is that of which we assert something?.... If I say ‘Venus has zero moons,’ there simply does not exist any moon or agglomeration of moons for anything to be asserted of; but what happens [he says] is that a property is assigned to the *concept*, ‘moon of Venus,’ namely that of including nothing under it” (59). How, though, to build a set with nothing in it, “nothing” being unavailable empirically? His answer: we perform a logical operation, a call for the set of all items that are not self-identical (in other words, where “A *does-not-equal A*”). Since everything is self-identical, there’s only one item in the set “A *does-not-equal-A*.” I repeat: that set contains just one item—and it is zero. In other words, we’re now in possession not just of zero but of one. We have logically constructed both those numbers. Precisely what, then, do we possess in the case of number? Frege answers, “number is neither spatial and physical...nor yet subjective, like ideas” (38). Like color, he says, number is “independent of our sensation, intuition and imagination, and of all construction of mental pictures out of memories of earlier sensations” (36). In number, we have an item that is “nonsensical and objective...[its] objectivity...based...only, so far as I can see, on reason” (38). I quote: “[A] statement of number expresses something factual independent of our way of regarding things..." (60). Frege notes that we can actually hear that factual status when instead of saying “Saturn has 4 moons,” we say, “the number of moons of Saturn is 4.” I think we also hear it when a little girl, asked to count her brothers and sisters, says, “We are seven.”
This takes us back to my earlier question regarding “she and maid and violet and star and Lucy”: what does and mean if not plus? Does each one (noun, pronoun, proper name) reference a common object either in or outside the text—like cloves stuck in an orange each from a different angle? Does the language build or project a composite one—what Badiou calls “a count-as-one”—from the several instances? I think we can agree that the special difficulty of this poem is that it disallows both those accounts—mimetic and constructivist—and it also rules out the transactional semiotics which readers of Wordsworth have come to expect. This Lucy poem projects an absolute co-incidence of word and thing, not a coupling of the two brokered by convention or by a reflective consciousness either hovering over the text, weaving its diverse threads into whole cloth, or, more frequent in Wordsworth, parachuting into its narrative frame.

My picture of the relation between ones and one in She dwell would look something like Duchamp’s Nude Descending a Staircase #2, a picture that calls up and in the same stroke cancels out the analogy to film animation—cancels it out, because contracting the recurrent into the continuous and the many into the one is exactly what does not happen in the painting. Each riser on the staircase brings forth a new mark, a new name, not indexing but instantiating the referent “nude descending a staircase.” We do not have one continuous meaning dragged along from step to step, or projected back before the first step and beyond the last step in the series. This nude has no memory. She begins—is beginning, more like—again and again. Like the x in a mathematical expression, each image signifies the formal function of reference itself. (And isn’t it apt, gorgeously ironically apt, to use a nude—a nude woman—to figure a function rather than a content?) What’s crucial to see, however, is that even as each image—again, each x in the equation of the picture—signifies the formal function of reference (that’s what x’s do), the value of each and every mark is utterly determined (Frege would say, stipulated) by its context. For instance, in \(3x + 1 = 7\), x can only be 2. In other words, in some nearly imponderable way, we get recurrence of reference and baptismal naming with each mark, each step of Duchamp’s nude, each Lucy noun, pronoun, appositive, and name. The reference is in each case intrinsic and inalienable, entailed or effected by each mark, not “related” to it in some way that could change. Using Frege’s terms, we could say that each mark discovers a new sense of its referent: where “sense” is not a point of view, an experience, or an imitation, but “an intellectual recreation.”

I take that phrase from Stein (and also, “beginning again and again” (313), from “Composition as Explanation”). I get the analogy to “x in a mathematical expression”—a brilliant comparison—from Ashton (Modernism, 87). [4] In “Poetry and Grammar,” Stein links naming, nouns, and loving the noun, to poetry. (She defines prose in terms of balance at the level of the sentence and paragraph, and links it to the verb.) Not all nouns can sponsor poetry, only a noun whose meaning is or has become entailed by its name, in the way I just described. Most nouns have gone over so wholly to their generic object—have become, as Stein says “the name of anything,” as in, “any” cat, dog, tree—that they have lost their possibility of being something: of being this cat, dog, tree. What they’ve lost is their active and inalienable attachment to their bearer, and in consequence, they have lost their grammatical liveliness and delicacy. Who could love such a noun—and in Stein’s view, that’s what poetry is, loving a name, and because one loves it, “using losing refusing and pleasing and betraying and caressing” it (327).

The reason Stein likes pronouns so much is that they wear their referential function on their sleeve, as is proper for lieutenants. [5] They “stand in,” and they make us see their standing, see the place they stand, and see their unique value or identity in that place, every time we look at them. (In this, they are not unlike the zero which enables positional notation.) They “acquire the logical function of the proper name each time [they] appear.... The reference is concentrated in each instance of the word, rendering it an autonomous, self-same entity” (Ashton, “Rose” 594, 595).

The appositives, pronouns, determiners, and proper name in She dwell (and certainly also in A slumber did my
spirit seal) do feel like entities, autonomous and selfsame. But so do the proper names in very different poems, such as Michael, Simon Lee, and many others. In fact, consider the striking number of poems in the corpus that are eponymously titled, either by Wordsworth or by scholarly convention: not just Michael and Simon Lee, but Alice Fell, Louisa, the Matthew poems, and others (along with such quasi-proper names as The Solitary Reaper, The Ruined Cottage, The Old Cumberland Beggar, The Discharged Soldier). Moreover, many of the common nouns in those poems also feel entailed. Think of the sheepfold, the tree stump, the cloak, the wooden dipper, the weathercock. You almost feel as if you could pick up that dipper or stand beside that sheepfold and each would speak its story. But think again. All these objects start out as a so-and-so, article indefinite. Only by poem’s end has the object acquired the the, the definite article. (Borrowing from Stein, only by the end has the poem meshed “character and career” [Stein, quoted in Ashton, “Rose” 584]). It is, of course, the narrator’s and the poem’s labor of relating the tale that ends up relating meaning to each noun and pronoun within it. Much of the force and all of the drama of these poems derives from the active encounter between an object and “an experiencing subject—any dog will do—to remember and identify [it]” (Ashton, “Rose” 602). “Beside the brook / Appears a straggling heap of unhewn stone! / And to that simple object appertains / A story . . . .” Wordsworth gives no clearer statement of his referential practice—his poetics, really. It’s all there in the verb, appertains.

31. “I am I because my little dog knows me” is how Stein formulates “identity” in The Geographical History of America, or The Relation of Human Nature to the Human Mind and What Are Master-Pieces and Why Are There So Few of Them (355, 402). And that is just how it works in Michael, The Ruined Cottage, and the others I mentioned: Michael, Margaret, the “four naked walls that star[e] upon each other”—they are they, discrete entities, because a narrator remembers and identifies them. [6] And of course, we are we—becoming fully ourselves, becoming humanized—as our reading inscribes us in that dramatic recognizance.

32. That’s so much not what happens in the Lucy poems, where the name takes on the characteristics of entity, Stein’s opposite number to identity. In the Lucy poems, everything works to abstract the name from any kind of lived continuum, any kind of history, any scene of recognition. It’s not that those contexts, content, and relationships go missing, rather that they seem to get drawn up into the name, like the forest pools in the Robert Frost poem, that go wholly into leaf, into the bordering trees. Merely by saying the name—she, violet, star, Lucy—one seems to blossom a world.

33. The names that we love—that we love to say over and over without getting bored—belong to that category; they are entities. For Stein, such names are “the proper object of poetry.” “Anybody knows how anybody calls out the name of anybody one loves” (314, 327, 329). I’ll wind this up with a genre thought, turning to Jonathan Culler’s discussion of lyric (he makes Spring Pools his example; hence my borrowing, above). Culler ties the special temporality of lyric to its “calling,” or as he says, its defining “call to be calling” (“Why Lyric?” 204), evidenced (or effected) by hyperbole and much more so by apostrophe. Quoting from Culler now: “Nothing need happen [in a lyric poem] because the poem itself is to be the happening.... The clearest example of this structure is of course the elegy” (“Apostrophe,” 149-150). In other words, it is the lyric’s eventual status, its status as an event of simultaneous cancellation and conjuration, which makes its structures, unlike those of narrative, untranslatable. It is, I believe, the entailment of meaning in name, or noun, or word, or poem, which intuitively signals lyric to us. What my thoughts here may possibly add to that general or ideal(ist) model of lyric (against which historical poetics pushes) are angles on the nature of the singularity that is conjured by the form, and angles too on the structure of the fantasy behind that singular sense. By fantasy, I mean that the proper name—the one, the singularity—set forth by lyric unleashes a dream of individuation or determination without negation: a something that is not over against nothing, not over against anything, and not over against everything. A singularity that feels self-grounded, as in,” the presentation of presentation itself” (Badiou’s definition of “being qua being”).

34. Obviously, it’s not that, not any of those dream things. To read in this way, to feel the poem as fully lyric, fully worded, self-same and autonomous, requires the kind of formalization I’ve been doing and describing here. I hope to hear from you whether and why you might agree or disagree that there are reasons to do this, or do it now, just as nearly thirty years ago there were reasons to do the opposite. Then, to wrest the word from its abstractions—to single out the poetic word—required re-inserting it into a lived continuum: the domain of reference, of recognition, of identity by Stein’s usage, as distinct from entity. “—But there’s a Tree, of many, one, / A single Field which I have looked upon, / Both of them speak of something that is gone.” Not a tree, I proposed, but the tree, Tree of Liberty, planted
not in “a” field but in “the” Field, Champs du Mars, circa 1789. The “something” that is gone is, or was, the Revolution in its republican phase, and with it, Wordsworth’s joy in that spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling, upsurge of collective energy.

35. Maybe it’s as simple as the windshield conundrum; you know how it is, how you can never see it, see the glass, see the smudge on the glass, while you’re looking through it at the road. One makes a choice. I want to say that in some cases, such as the Lucy poems, the glass itself invites one kind of viewing or it discourages the other. But I don’t say this because anyone would have said the same thing about the Immortality Ode, or Tintern Abbey, or the many other poems released into time by historicist methods—or, put another way, singled out by desire, discourse, and différance. I suppose what I’ve been about here, in this talk, is a sifting and sorting, an effort to get at the different kinds of things we pick out when we say or see or construct a one.

She dwelt among th’ untrodden ways
Beside the springs of Dove,
A Maid whom there were none to praise
And very few to love.
A Violet by a mossy Stone
Half-hidden from the Eye!
---Fair as a star when only one
Is shining in the sky!
She /v/d unknown, and few could know
When Lucy ceas’d to be;
But she is in her Grave, and oh!
The difference to me.

Works Cited


Notes

[1] “In the condensed phrase ‘inhuman lyricism’ I mean to recall the nineteenth century’s association of birdsong with a pure expressive capacity the poet cannot own...a song the poet cannot voice” (Jackson 27). See also Milne. BACK

[2] Slakey includes “fair” in the list of appositives: “Fair’ is adjectival in form, yet it has the same function as the words “Maid’ and ‘violet.” It is an appositive, not a modifier, of “She” (634). BACK

[3] See Jones for this discussion. BACK

[4] My entire line of thought here is indebted to Ashton (“Rose is a Rose” and “Gertrude Stein for Anyone”). BACK

[5] I owe the activation of “lieutenant’s etymology to Rebecca Porte (see third paragraph, above). BACK

[6]

Apropos the other proper name in the poem, springs of Dove, Hartman suggests that the reference is “not [to] the river which divides Derby from Stafford, but the district of Dovedale, Westmorland, below Dove Crag—a region which the poet had explored during his Hawkshead vacation of 1788” (136-137). He quotes from the 1850 *Prelude*: “That streamlet whose blue current works its way / Between romantic Dovedale’s spiry rocks” (Slakey 137).

In a private correspondence, Tim Fulford offered the following: “What I wondered about the other proper name in the poem was that Wordsworth’s phrasing gestures towards/assumes local knowledge—as if he doesn’t need to specify it as the river Dove, because we’d all already know where/what it is. Obviously, he does this a lot in poems with Lake District place names—but this one isn’t very specific (unlike, say, Helvellyn)—and so it tantalises; it seems almost deixical but we can’t point to it— which Dove, where? There’s one in the Lakes, another in Yorkshire, a famous one in Derbyshire . . . There are many rivers of that name in England . . . many ‘ones’ as you’d put it . . . so the name almost seems generic, but can’t quite be that either—unless Lucy is also generic . . . It’s as if it hovers between deixis and genericism. I feel a little jolt of uncertainty or inadequacy as I read/hear it. How to construe? as if for a flicker the springs of Dove might not be a stream but the flight of a bird . . . I suppose on the one hand the ambiguity/unfixability creates the aura of mystery the poem wants . . . but on the other it calls naming and the knowledge naming provides into doubt . . . ” I wonder if Stein’s entity/identity distinction (and Ashton’s distinction between meanings entailed versus indexed or related) helps us structure this “almost deixical” naming. 

BACK
Notes and queries. The nature and design of the present work have been so fully stated in the Prospectus, and are indeed so far explained by its very Title, that it is unnecessary to occupy any great portion of its first number with details on the subject. We are under no temptation to fill its columns with an account of what we hope future numbers will be. Learn music note names on musical staff, type of notes, time value, duration, names of keys on piano keyboard and more. It gets even more amazing! Other music note names are the demihemidemisemiquaver (a hundred twenty-eighth note) and Demisemihemidemisemiquaver (a two hundred fifty-sixth note). Try saying this aloud. Ha!