On pgs. 202-203 of his essay "On Sense and Nominatum" (as printed in the Martinich volume), Gottlob Frege considers whether sentences have nominata if those sentences contain proper names which do not have nominata. The example he provides is the sentence "Odysseus deeply asleep was disembarked at Ithaca." Frege asserts that this sentence's sense is unproblematic. As he argues in the immediately preceding paragraphs, a sentence's sense is just the proposition which it expresses. However, whether this sentence has a nominatum is unclear, specifically because one of the sentence-components (ostensibly) lacks a nominatum. As it is unlikely that Odysseus was a real historical figure, the proper name "Odysseus" lacks a referent. The worry is that, in general, if one or more specific sentence-components lack a nominatum, this may threaten the sentence's candidacy for designating a nominatum.

This leads Frege to consider why it is that we are at all interested in the nominata of sentences. He considers that perhaps the sense of sentences is all we need concern ourselves with, that looking for a nominatum is "going farther than necessary" (202). However, he points out that simply grasping a sentence's sense doesn't generally satisfy us in the course of linguistic enterprise. We want to know more; precisely, we want to know whether the sentence is true or not. It is this concern that ultimately leads Frege to identify a given sentence's nominatum with its truth-value (203).

So what, then, are we to do about sentences like the one involving our friend Odysseus above? Frege argues that we are not always concerned with the truth-values of sentences. Often, we appreciate properties of sentences with regard to different sets of standards. Sometimes, we are "fascinated by the euphony of the language and also by the sense of the sentences and by the images and emotions evoked" (203). The question of a sentence's nominatum only matters if we are concerned with the truth-value, so in contexts where we are not so concerned (e.g.
appreciating an epic poem), whether or not a sentence has a nominatum is unimportant. While he doesn't come right out and say it, Frege seems to imply that if sentences have sentence-components that lack nominata, then those sentences will lack nominata as well. He considers himself to have established that this is unproblematic, as he alludes to on pg. 202: "The proposition loses in interest as soon as we recognize that one of its parts is lacking a nominatum."

There are two major criticisms to level against this account. First, Frege fails to establish that every time we encounter a sentence containing a sentence-component which lacks a nominatum, we are in a context in which we are not concerned with that sentence's truth-value. Put another way, Frege hasn't ruled out that we might be interested in the truth-value of a sentence, only to discover that a proper name used in that sentence lacks a referent. Take, for example, the sentence "Odysseus is the hero of the epic poem The Odyssey." The form of the sentence is the same, but this is a sentence to which we would clearly want to assign a truth-value; the sentence is uncontroversially true. Note that the same problem arises if we introduce sentences with negative existentials, like "Odysseus was not a real person"; also uncontroversially true. Both of these sentences contain sentence-components lacking nominata, and they could both appear in contexts in which we are concerned with the truth-values of these sentences. So if a sentence-component's lacking a nominatum genuinely undermines the chance of the sentence as a whole having a nominatum, then Frege has failed to sidestep this worry in a number of important cases; the threat remains.

The second criticism of Frege's account is that it may not be uncontroversial after all that sentences like the one he considers on pg. 202 do have a clear sense. A parallel threat might be identified if we argue that proper names of non-existent entities lack a sense. It would seem (given the lack of a better alternative supplied by Frege) that the only way we can identify a sense for a proper name is via a definite description. In fact, in his only treatment of sentence-components which have senses but no nominata, his only example is a definite description. The problem is, given a certain proper name, there may be multiple definite descriptions that
uniquely describe it. Consider Odysseus; are we to say that 'Odysseus' is identical with 'The hero of the *The Odyssey*" or with "the father of Telemachus" or with "the inventor of the Trojan Horse"? If sentence-sense, like sentence-nominatum, is compositional, then a sentence-component's having multiple senses is at least as problematic as the sentence-component's having no sense at all! In any case, Frege is unclear on two points here: first, about whether the sense of proper names is to be understood in terms of definite descriptions, and second, if they are, what we are to do about settling on one definite description with which to replace the name rather than another.

Very nicely done.
I like the review & the comment - both are argumentative & both are sharply focused. You might have selected only one of the cuts - minus & beefed it up a bit... but that's a minor complaint.

Well done!