What you're presented with is not what you predicate over:
Copular agreement in presentational contexts

NP1-NP2 predicational clauses (*Mary is a doctor*) crosslinguistically display copular agreement with NP1 (*Mary*). However, specificational and identificational clauses (*The problem is the children/ The doctor is Max*) allow NP2 (*children/Max*) agreement in some languages (Moro 1991, a.o.). Existing accounts of NP2 agreement argue that NP2 in these constructions denotes an individual, and NP1 is not structurally accessible to agreement either because it is not the underlying subject (Mikkelsen 2005, Den Dikken 2006 a.o.), or because it is a more complex structure (e.g., concealed proposition; Romero 2005, Heycock 2012, a.o.). The crosslinguistic variation between NP1 and NP2 agreement is then reduced to differences in the feature composition of the probe (e.g., Béjar and Kahnemuyiopour 2017, 2018). We contribute to this discussion by a novel data from Czech and German presentational clauses, a class of identificational clauses (*This book is a novel*; Higgins 1973, Mikkelsen 2005). These copular clauses display an unusual agreement and anaphoric behavior: (a) the copula can agree with NP1 or NP2, without any evidence of movement within the structure, (b) NP2 functions as a predicate, not an individual, irrespective of whether the copula agrees with NP1 or NP2, and (c) the ϕ-features (number, gender) of an inter-sentential anaphor can match the ϕ-features of NP1 or NP2, even if NP2 does not denote an individual. We argue that the agreement variability results from two underlying structures: (a) a regular predicational clause that gives rise to an obligatory NP1 agreement, and a presentational clause where the NP2 agreement is mediated by a covert topic pronoun bound by the individual in the presentational situation (NP1). In turn, NP2 predicates over the covert pronoun (effectively the topic situation), not NP1. NP1 is merged in the spec of TopicP which makes it inaccessible to a low agreement probe. However, when NP1 cannot be merged in TopicP either because the language lacks a middlefield TopicP (as in English), or because the position is occupied by another structural element, only NP1 agreement is possible, and a regular predication pattern arises. In intensional contexts, e.g. under modals, where the binding topic situation cannot be to an individual, the predication is over situations. NP2 agreement is possible but individual-denoting cross-clausal anaphors may only refer to NP1.

The puzzle: In Czech, the copula in NP1-NP2 predicational clauses must agree with NP1, (1). However, in presentational contexts where NP2 classifies NP1 agreement with NP2 is possible, while NP2 retains its predicate properties, (2). We call these clauses *classificatory clauses* (CCs) to distinguish them from identificational clauses with an individual-like NP2. [Here we only discuss Czech data because they display gender and number agreement in all relevant environments.]

(1) Marie byla/ *byl profesor na univerzitě
Marie.**F**.SG was.**F**.SG/ was.**M**.SG professor.M.SG at university
'Marie was a university professor.'

(2) a. Tenhle strom byl/ byla lípa.
this tree.**M**.SG was.**M**.SG/ was.**F**.SG linden_tree.F.SG
'This tree was a linden tree.' (e.g., while pointing at a tree stamp)

b. Tenhle film byl/ byla komedie.
this movie.**M**.SG was.**M**.SG/ was.**F**.SG comedy.F.SG
'This movie was a comedy.' (e.g., while pointing at an old movie poster)

Strikingly, the ϕ-features of an intra-sentential anaphor can match either NP1 or NP2. Speakers prefer the copular and anaphoric agreement to match but a mixed pattern is possible, (3).

(3) Tenhle strom byl/ byla lípa.
this tree.**M**.SG was.**M**.SG/ **F**.SG linden_tree.F.SG

'This tree was a linden tree.'

a. (On) byl vysoký/ (Ona) byla vysoká.
(**he**) was.M.SG tall.M.SG/ (**she**) was.F.SG tall.F.SG
'It was tall.'

Crucially, the variable agreement only arises when the copula intervenes between NP1 and NP2. When the copula precedes NP1, the copula must agree with NP1, replicating the agreement profile of specificational and identificational clauses in Germanic (e.g., Hartmann & Heycock 2018, 2020). In this case, anaphoric agreement is only with NP1 [data omitted].

(4) Podle mého názoru, byl/ *byla tenhle strom lípa.
according_to my opinion was.**M**.SG/ *was.**F**.SG this tree.M.SG linden_tree.**F**.SG
'In my opinion, this tree was a linden tree.'

The analysis: The variable agreement attested with CCs is a reflex of a *structural ambiguity*: (a) a regular *predicational clause*, and (b) a *presentational clause* where the agreement is mediated by a covert presentational pronoun. **(a)** With much of the literature on **predicational** clauses, we assume that NP1 and NP2 form a small clause that merges with a predicative head, and that NP1 raises to its specifier. NP1 values the unvalued ϕ-features of v: [v [NP1 [Pred [t_{NP1} NP2]]]] **(b)** We propose that the **presentational** structure includes an additional structural element that mediates agreement: a covert presentational pronoun, following the insight of Moltmann (2013). Moltmann argues that presentational pronouns in identificational clauses (*that* in *That is Mary*) do not denote an individual but instead they refer to a perceived property associated with an individual included in the presentational context. We formalize this intuition as a situational pronoun (demonstrative IT) that is composed of a nominal part (a set of unvalued ϕ-features) and a variable (akin to Kratzer 2009's minimal pronoun index) which gets bound by a topic situation. In CCs, the variable gets bound by the individual denoted by NP1 merged in a Topic projection, located above vP (e.g., Frey 2000). The denotation of the pronoun then gets restricted by the predicative NP2 with which it agrees in ϕ-features. The resulting interpretation of a CC of the form *This movie is a comedy* (cf. (2b)) can be paraphrased as: the movie determines a topic situation such that the individual in it (demonstrative IT) as a comedy-like-thing is a comedy. The corresponding syntactic derivation proceeds as follows: The presentational pronoun (IT) forms a small clause with NP2; the unvalued ϕ-features of IT get valued by the features of NP2 (either by Agree via Merge, or a concord). After Pred merges with the structure, IT moves to its specifier. When v merges with PredP, IT is the closest accessible goal. v agrees with this presentational pronoun, and reflexively with the ϕ-features of NP2. Next, the Topic head merges and NP1 externally merges as its specifier. NP1 binds the variable in IT but cannot value v: [NP1 [Topic [IT [v [t_{IT} [Pred [t_{IT} NP2]]]]]]]. **Predictions:** (i) If the topic position is occupied by another structural element, then NP1 cannot be merged in spec,TopP. Instead, NP1 must have been merged as the specifier of the small clause. Consequently, there cannot be any presentational pronoun in the structure and the agreement must be with NP1, as seen in (4). (ii) If a language does not have an argumental topic position (in the middle field), such a language cannot accommodate a copular clause with two NPs and a presentational pronoun. Consequently, such a language only allows NP1 agreement. The prediction is borne out in languages like English. (iii) If the topic situation cannot be mapped onto an individual (a minimal witness set), e.g., in modalized environments, NP2 agreement is possible but cross-clausal anaphors cannot.