

In Defence of a Type-Token View. Response to Morris

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Abstract: What is the ontological status of a musical work? This paper enters the discussion of the question between Julian Dodd and Michael Morris. Dodd is a proponent of a type-token view, which is a version of Platonism. Morris has formulated an argument that purports to show that a musical work cannot be a token of a type. If successful, the argument presents a serious challenge for a type-token theorist with implications for Platonism as a whole. Morris's argument is, however, problematic in several respects. The aim of this paper is to identify the problems and weaken the strength of Morris's argument, thus restoring the original appeal of a type-token view.

Key terms: Cambridge property, intentional reductionism, type-token distinction.

Introduction

I am a Platonist. A type-token view (TTV) is a version of Platonism. Michael Morris has formulated an argument that presents a serious challenge to (TTV) and, consequently, to Platonism (see Morris 2007). The argument is presented in the context of the ontology of musical works. Morris's argument was answered by Julian Dodd (2007, 135-139). Dodd's answer is, however, inadequate. The aim of this paper is, at least, to weaken the seriousness of Morris's challenge to (TTV).

The paper has three sections. In the first one, (TTV) is outlined. The second section presents Morris's argument together with Dodd's inadequate treatment of it. The third section identifies and discusses several problems in Morris's argument.

1

Why should we be type-token theorists about musical works? The answer is that it seems to provide the best explanation of certain facts that we intuitively associate with the notion of a musical work. In what follows in the rest of this section I shall adopt Morris's outline of the basic argument for (TTV) (cf. Morris 2007, 54-55). The facts that (TTV) explains so well are:

- (i) musical works can be heard;
- (ii) the existence of a musical work does not depend on any particular performance;
- (iii) the same musical work can be performed many times.

Fact (i) is uncontroversial; and it introduces, implicitly, a notion of performance because it is only in a performance that a musical work can be heard. Notice that in virtue of (ii) and (iii) a performance cannot be identical to a musical work. Facts (ii) and (iii) remove musical works from the realm of spatio-temporally located objects, 'in which case it is natural to describe them as "abstract"' (Morris 2007, 54). Typically, abstract entities are not taken to be particulars. Thus, if musical works are not particulars they must be types. And if they are types, it is natural to understand their performances as their tokens.

In terms of a type-token distinction the facts (i) – (iii) are explained in a following way:

- (i*) musical works can be heard because they are types that can be 'tokened in a particular performance' (Morris 2007, 54);
- (ii*) the existence of a musical work does not depend on any particular performance because types can exist without being tokened;
- (iii*) the same musical work can be performed many times because types can be tokened many times.

2

Morris's argument against (TTV) is one of those difficult to sum up. Julian Dodd understands Morris as offering the following argument (cf. Dodd 2007, 137):

DM1: The purpose of a work of music, *W*, is that it be understood.

DM2: *W* could not have had this purpose unless *W*'s composer had created *W* for that purpose; so

DM3: *W*'s composer created *W*.

A fundamental property of types, according to (TTV), is that they are atemporal, non-created entities. If works of art must be created to count as works of art then they cannot be types.

Formulated like this, Morris's argument seems to be an easy target. A type-token theorist will deny (DM1), 'resisting all talk of a work having such a purpose *in itself*' (Dodd 2007, 137). According to a type-token theorist, a musical work has no teleological *why* to it; it is 'not in itself for anything' (Dodd 2007, 137). Although Dodd is, I believe, on the right track here, his treatment of Morris's argument is inadequate in two respects. First, what Dodd presents as Morris's argument is just a half of it. Morris is offering, in the same paper (Morris 2007), a related but to a relevant extent independent argument which, I think, requires a separate answer. This related argument seems, *prima facie*, to depend on (DM1), which might have led Dodd to omit it believing that it had been rebutted with the denial of (DM1). The second respect in which Dodd's treatment of Morris's objection is inadequate is its failure to take seriously an implication of denying (DM1). The implication of denying (DM1), i.e., denying that musical works are there to be understood is, Morris argues, that it leaves musical works meaningless.

In the rest of this section I shall present an outline and a brief sympathetic discussion of Morris's argument against (TTV) as I understand him. As a result, we shall see in what sense meaningfulness of a musical work is at stake here and it will become clear that Morris's argument is more complex and sophisticated than suggested by Dodd's version of it.

2.1 The outline of Morris's argument

M1: Works of art are essentially meaningful.

M2: To be meaningful is to be there to be understood.

M3: The *purpose* of a work of art is to be understood.

The theoretical constraints imposed on the concept of an artwork by (M1) - (M3) make the concept doubly incompatible with (TTV).

Argument for the first incompatibility:

M4: (M3), i.e., the purpose of a work of art is to be understood.

M5: An artwork has this purpose only if created for that purpose.

M6: An artist created the artwork.

M7: (M6) violates the fundamental condition of (TTV), i.e. the condition that types are not created.

Argument for the second incompatibility:

M8: A common property of the performances (tokens) of a musical work (type) is, among others, that they (the performances) must involve *understanding that* work to count as performances.

M9: Types are individuated by common properties of their tokens.

M10: (TTV) is a reductive view, and 'aiming to specify the relation between performances and a work without using the notion of a work itself' (Morris 2007, 71).

M11: A reductive analysis of *understanding that* work (which is one of the individuating properties of a relevant performance), i.e., intentional reductionism, is a) notoriously difficult and b) circular.

Therefore

M12: (M10) is violated, i.e., (TTV) cannot provide a reductive analysis of the relation between a work of music and its performances without running into serious problems.

2.2 A brief discussion of Morris's argument

(M1) is a fundamental departure point of the argument. It is a source of the seriousness of the challenge that the argument poses to (TTV). The intuitive plausibility of the claim that works of art are essentially¹ meaningful is very strong indeed; it 'ought to be a truism' (Morris 2007, 56). In Morris's words:

[I]t is clear that works of art are meaningful because it is clear that one cannot properly consider a work of art as a work of art without

¹ The qualification 'essentially' is added a little bit later in the argument. Nothing hinges on it at this point. So I will simplify matters slightly and use it already in the first premise. I believe that the inclusion of 'essentially' doesn't weaken the *prima facie* plausibility of (M1). For the function of 'essentially' in the argument, see Morris (2007, 58).

considering it as meaningful. To treat a work of art as not being meaningful would be to treat it as some kind of found object, a curious feature of the natural world, and this is precisely not to treat it as a work of art. (Morris 2007, 56)

Morris doesn't really provide an argument for (M1), just supporting considerations. In my view, the intuitive plausibility of (M1) doesn't call for any argument.

The notion of meaningfulness as employed in (M1) is unsatisfyingly broad. (M2) narrows it down. It explains meaning in terms of understanding. Morris invokes Dummett's familiar slogan that 'a theory of meaning is a theory of understanding' (Morris 2007, 59). However, the relation between meaningfulness and understanding cannot be a 'mere correlation' if we want to avoid implications such as: weather systems can be understood *ergo* they are meaningful (cf. Morris 2007, 59). Morris, therefore, introduces a teleological element into the relation in a form of intentional 'to' in the phrase 'there to be understood.' This element of intentional purposefulness has two functions in Morris's argument, a) it blocks the inference from understandability to meaningfulness in cases like the one above with weather systems, and b) it prepares the ground for the later claim that works of art must be created.

(M3) is just a more explicit version of (M2). Claims (M1) – (M3) constitute the logic behind (DM1), i.e., behind the first premise of Morris's argument against (TTV) as presented by Dodd (see above). Our brief discussion of (M1) – (M3) makes it clear why denying (DM1) will not be as easy as Dodd wants us to believe. Together with denying (DM1) we deny meaningfulness of a work of art. And is that what we want?

After (M1) – (M3), the argument forks into two partly independent arguments. The first one, (M4) – (M7), is nothing else than a slightly different formulation of Dodd's presentation of Morris's argument that we have outlined above as (DM1) – (DM3). The crucial claim here is (M5). (M5) says: An artwork has this purpose – the purpose of being there to be understood – only if created for that purpose. Here again, Morris seems to rely on intuitive plausibility of the claim, which is, at the same time, 'underlined by [his] analysis of meaningfulness as being there *to be understood*' (Morris 2007, 64). Thus Morris defines meaningfulness as stemming from a correlation of intentional purposefulness with understanding. Such a definition calls, quite naturally, for an intentional agent. This call is answered in (M5) and, more explicitly, in (M6). In support of (M5), Morris also claims that a relevant understanding of

a work of art (i.e., an understanding that does justice to an artwork) wouldn't be possible without 'the hearer or viewer assuming [that the artwork] was produced by an artist' (Morris 2007, 66). This leads to (M6) and (M7), i.e., as we have noted above, (M6) violates one of the fundamental conditions of (TTV), which is: types cannot be created.

The second argument, (M8) – (M12), might present a much more serious challenge to a type-token theorist than the first one. The hesitation behind the 'might' here is caused by the fact that it is not very clear how damaging the argument is for (TTV). The crucial step of the argument is what we have formulated above as (M8):

A common property of the performances (tokens) of a musical work (type) is, among others, that they (the performances) must involve *understanding that* work to count as performances.

A performance of a musical work must have, to count as a performance, two properties:

- P1: a property of 'being there to open the work to understanding' (Morris 2007, 71);
- P2: a property of being accompanied by understanding the work of which they are a performance.

Or as Morris puts it:

A performance seems to be connected by understanding to the works of which it is a performance – and not once, but twice. First, its nature as a performance is defined functionally, as being there to open the work to understanding. And secondly, the performance only counts as a performance (rather than a reproduction) by itself depending on an understanding the work. (Morris 2007, 70-71)

A performance of a musical work must involve understanding in the sense of having the intentional properties (P1) and (P2). The demonstrative *that* in (M8) secures the identity relation between the work and only the relevant performances, i.e., we don't want a performer understanding an unrelated script while 'performing' a sound sequence as being enough to confer the status of performance on her act in virtue of her understanding something else. Here again, Morris doesn't seem to be offering an argument for (M8). He appeals to intuition instead.

Before I proceed to offer a little discussion of the rest of the argument, I want to come back to what I have already mentioned above, i.e., that Dodd's denial of (DM1) might not be enough to deal satis-

factorily with Morris's argument. I would like to believe at this point that our brief analysis of (M8) and the doubly involved property of understanding have prepared the ground for seeing the inadequacy of Dodd's response. Not only does not Dodd's treatment of the argument fully appreciate what is at stake with denial of (DM1) – that is, the meaningfulness of an artwork – his denial of (DM1) might have missed one of the targets all together. (DM1) is analogous to (P1) with respect to the property of purposefulness. Compare:

DM1: *The purpose* of a work of music, *W*, is that it be understood.

(P1) can be paraphrased as: *The purpose* of a performance of a work of music is to open it to understanding.

Thus both (DM1) and (P1) seem to involve a similar teleological element. And it is this very element that Dodd refuses to accept when he says: '[a] musical work, [...], is not in itself *for* anything: it is an eternally existent type of sound-sequence-event' (Dodd 2007, 137). In other words, if musical works (as types) do not have any purpose in themselves then their performances (as tokens) cannot derive their purpose from the (lacking) purpose of the work.

Dodd, as I believe, presented only one of Morris's arguments thinking that the other one too – our (M8) – (M12) – relies on an appeal to the essential purposefulness that we have identified in both (DM1) and (P1) and which Dodd denies. But Morris's argument is still standing in virtue of (P2) because (P2) doesn't seem to involve any kind of purposefulness. (P2) just says that a performance of a musical work must go hand in hand with understanding that work to count as a performance. We shall see what, according to Morris, is the implication of (P2) when considered together with (M9) – (M11).

(M9) is an uncontentious condition of individuation of types. (M10) is similarly uncontroversial. The whole purpose of (TTV) is to provide a reductive analysis of the relation between a work of music and its performances. A type-token theorist claims that all musical works share an identical relation to their performances. The relation is the one between a type and its token. At the same time it is expected that the relation is, at least in principle, specifiable in an epistemologically *kosher* way. (M11), however, claims that such a *kosher* reductive analysis cannot be provided. Two reasons are given for the claim:

- R1: '*Understanding that work*' is an individuating property that a performance must have to count as a performance.² The property of *understanding* is an intentional property and any attempt at its reductive analysis will lead to 'the familiar minefield which surrounds all forms of intentional reductionism' (Morris 2007, 72).
- R2: The demonstrative *that* in '*understanding that work*' cannot be dropped from the description – as it, in this context, secures the identity relation between a musical work and relevant tokens – which opens the analysis to the charge of circularity. The circularity would have the following form: Asked which performances count as performances of that work, we would have to answer – using as an identifying property the property of '*understanding that work*' – that only those ones that are performances that have a property of '*understanding that work*' count as performances of *that work*. Clearly, that wouldn't be very helpful. This seems to be a serious challenge to (TTV) and one that, in my view, escapes Dodd's objection.

3

As I said above, I believe that Dodd is right to deny (DM1), i.e., to deny that works of art are there to be understood. At the same time, I don't want to say that works of art are meaningless, which, Morris argues, goes hand in hand with denying (DM1). Let me slightly reformulate Morris's first argument to see what's going on there:

RM1: Works of art are meaningful.

RM2: '*Understanding*' is an intentional verb.

RM3: To be meaningful = to be there to be understood. This impregnates meaningfulness with intentionality.

RM4: Intentionality requires an intentional agent; in our context: a creator.

Now, it's clear that the crucial premise is (RM3). This is where the Trojan horse of intentionality with a creator inside gets into the argu-

² '*Understanding that work*' must be understood here in the sense of (P2) if we want to keep Morris's argument safe from Dodd's objection.

ment. And this is where the argument must be blocked by a type-token theorist. There are, I think, two serious problems with (RM3), i.e., with impregnating meaningfulness with intentionality.

SP1: It leads to intentional fallacy.

SP2: It leads to incoherence within such a concept of meaningfulness.

Intentional fallacy is a mistaken view of interpreting an artwork on the basis of artist's intentions. The view is widely disrespected. (RM3) seems to be open to the charge of intentional fallacy. Morris is aware of the danger and responds to (SP1) in a following way:

[T]he meaning of the work of art is due to the intentional exploitation of the independent properties of the medium. [...] [T]he medium of any work of art is always formed within a tradition over time, and is always understood within that tradition. The tradition itself is a tradition of using the medium intentionally, given the properties the medium has acquired as an intentionally exploited medium within a tradition of using it intentionally. [...] It is the artist's business to understand these independent properties and to know how to work with them. (Morris 2007, 68-69)

What we have here is this:

IM1: An artist creates within the confines of a medium.

IM2: A medium has independent properties that it has acquired by having been used intentionally within a relevant tradition.

IM3: An artist intentionally exploits these independent properties of a medium.

Now the charge of (SP1) is answered by an appeal to the independent properties of a medium while the role of a creator still remains crucial in virtue of the exploitation of the independent properties that must be performed by an artist in the process of creation of an artwork. I think this move, (IM1) – (IM3), is problematic. Against the background of the question, 'Where does the meaningfulness of a work of art come from?', we have to ask: When exploiting a medium, does an artist discover the elements of meaningfulness in the independent properties of the medium or does she, as it were, give birth to meaningfulness in the process of manipulating the independent properties that are themselves essentially meaningless?

The word 'to exploit' is ambiguous here. Clearly, Morris cannot answer that the meaningfulness in question originates in the process of manipulating meaningless properties. Such an answer would immediately point to an artist as the source of the meaningfulness, and the charge of intentional fallacy is back. Morris needs to insist that an artistic medium, in some sense, already contains the meaningfulness. And this is what he must have in mind, I think, when he talks about the tradition of intentional exploitation that constitutes independent properties of the medium.

It should be noticed at this point that the expression 'medium' can be used to refer to a) the physical material that the artist uses and b) the form that she uses. 'Medium' as used by Morris cannot be the physical material because there is simply no way the intentionality could be somehow *in* it. Thus 'medium' refers, in our context, to a form, i.e., to something abstract. This point together with (IM2), i.e., the claim that a medium has independent intentional properties, leads to a peculiar result. It looks like a medium can be understood as an independent intentional realm which is a source of meaningfulness. 'To exploit a medium' would then mean something like transferring bits of meaningfulness from the realm of the medium into the physical world in the process of artistic creation. This is, however, too close to Platonism. It seems to me that Morris faces a dilemma here. He lets either an artist or the independent intentional realm of the medium to be a source of meaningfulness. With 'an artist' as the source he will end up in the trap of intentional fallacy while the 'realm of meaningfulness' gets him too close to Platonism that he is arguing against. I also suspect that any attempt to combine some sort of weak version of an artist's intentionality with a similarly weakened version of the realm of meaningfulness in order to avoid both horns of the dilemma will only result in fudge.

Defining meaningfulness in terms of intentionality, (RM3), leads to a related problem, (SP2): incoherence in the very notion of such a concept of meaningfulness. The argument behind (SP2):

ASP1: Only created objects are meaningful.

ASP2: Natural objects are not created therefore they are not meaningful.³

³ 'To treat a work of art as not being meaningful would be to treat it as some kind of found object, a curious feature of the natural world [...]'; see Morris (2007, 56).

ASP3: The created objects derive their meaningfulness, in some way, from their creators.

ASP4: The creators in question are humans.

ASP5: Humans are themselves natural entities, therefore:

ASP6: Humans are meaningless entities, therefore (a conclusion in a form of a question):

ASP7: How can meaningless entities - humans - be a source of meaningfulness?

(ASP1) - (ASP3) just exploit premises that Morris himself relies on, which is, as I believe at this point of the paper, quite clear and thus doesn't require further discussion. Yet, with respect to (ASP3), it should be noticed that the premise can accommodate a very broad concept of 'creators'. It can be both an individual creator and/or a tradition of intentional exploitation of a medium that is constituted by activities and interactions of creators (and audience). For the argument to go through it is enough to trace the meaningfulness back to human activities in some way or the other.

With respect to (ASP4), God could be suggested as an alternative creator. This is, however, clearly not an option for Morris. Bringing God into the picture makes everything created and, consequently, meaningful. In a world created by God, an artist is only a discoverer, and the view of types as a-temporal and non-created (by human artists) entities is safe.

(ASP5) is, in my view, a reasonably plausible claim. Denying it amounts to challenging the orthodoxy of the evolutionary theory that understands humans as essentially embedded in the realm of nature.

(ASP6) follows straightforwardly from (ASP1), (ASP2) and (ASP5). It says that humans are meaningless entities in the sense of lacking the meaningfulness as understood by Morris. This leads to a puzzling question: How can something that lacks any meaningfulness be a source of it? The question exposes an inner tension or incoherence within the concept of meaningfulness that depends on intentionality in the way required by Morris's argument.

Let us assume that our discussion of (SP1) and (SP2) has showed that meaningfulness cannot be derived from intentionality. Does it mean that we have to give up meaningfulness of an artwork all together? This is a consequence of denying that a work of art is there to be understood, Morris will insist. And, in a sense, he is right here;

but just to an extent. If one's ontology already presupposes that the natural world is intrinsically meaningless she will, having denied that meaningfulness can be derived from human intentionality, end up in a completely meaningless world. In such a world works of art too can't but be meaningless. This, however, is not a destination point for someone – a Platonist, for example – who believes that the world as a *whole* is, in some sense, already meaningful. For a Platonist, the world derives its meaningfulness from its relation to the world of *eidos* and their relation to some kind of transcendental intentionality. Works of art are, then, deriving their meaningfulness from a relation of some kind to the world of *eidos*. Obviously, this is just a tiny fragment of an account that would be needed to make this view plausible. But that is not my task in this paper. I rest content with having pointed to the fact that there are theoretical options that will preserve meaningfulness of an artwork without it being derived from human intentionality.

Now I will turn to the other argument of Morris's; the one that we have formulated as (M8) – (M12) in section 2. Here I want to focus and cast some doubt on (M8). (M8) says: A common property of the performances (tokens) of a musical work (type) is, among others, that they (the performances) must involve understanding *that* work to count as performances.

The intentional property of understanding is involved in two ways, as we have already seen in section 2, i.e. as:

- P1: a property of being there *to* open the work to understanding;
- P2: a property of being accompanied by understanding the work of which they are a performance.

Recall that (P1) has been discussed above in the form of (DM1) and (M1) – (M3). Thus the one still standing is (P2). The reader will have remembered that it is in its (P2) aspect that Morris's argument has escaped Dodd's and ours objections so far.

Now, I have two worries about (M8). First, I can't see why a performance doesn't count as a performance without understanding. Second, I think the property of being accompanied by understanding the work isn't really a property of the work but a property of the performer instead. With respect to the claim that a performance isn't a performance without understanding, Morris seems to be offering an argument in a form of the following analogy:

- A1: Both an etching and a musical work are reproducible works.
- A2: When an etching is *mechanically* reproduced, as when 'the process of pressing the copper plate on paper lets the works be seen as it is supposed to be seen', we don't call it *performing* an etching (Morris 2007, 70).
- A3: Analogously, when a reproduction of a musical work is *mechanical*, i.e., without understanding, we don't call it *performing* a musical work; therefore:
- A4: Understanding is essential to a performance.

I think it's clear what is wrong with the analogy. Pressing the copper plate on paper will not be called *performing* an etching even when accompanied by understanding of any kind. And if understanding accompanying the process of pressing the copper plate on paper doesn't confer the status of performance on the process why should it do so in the case of a musical performance. Morris still owes us an account of why a performance must be accompanied by understanding to count as a performance.

However, even if such an account is provided and is found to be convincing, it is not sure that Morris's argument can get to (M12), i.e., to the conclusion that a reductive analysis of a type-token relation cannot be done in the case of musical works and their performances. Above, we have seen that if '*understanding that work*', which is an intentional property, is taken to be an individuating property of a performance it leads to a) a blind alley of intentional reductionism and b) to circularity. But it is not clear at all in what sense the intentional property of '*understanding that work*' can be in any way a property of a *performance*. It seems much more natural to say that *understanding* anything is always an exclusive property of an intentional *agent*. And this is, in our context, a performer. It is of course possible to ascribe to a performance a relational property of *being* understood by a performer. But such a property is a mere Cambridge (i.e. relational) property and thus cannot be in any way essential to a performance which is a spatiotemporal physical entity.⁴ And if it is not an essential property of a performance

⁴ The distinction hinted at here, i.e., *relational* - or Cambridge - versus *non-relational* properties is also known as a distinction between *intrinsic* and *extrinsic* properties. For a detailed discussion on which properties count as *relational* (*extrinsic*), that is essential, properties, see for instance Humberstone (1996).

then a type-token theorist is not committed to a theoretical reduction of *it* nor to coping with the related circularity.

I have objected that '*understanding that work*' is to be taken as a property of a performer and not as a property of a performance. In an informal response (as an e-mail answer) to this objection, Morris says:

I am happy to accept that understanding the work is a property of the performer, but it will, I think, transmit some at least relevantly similar property to the performance itself, since a performance of a work is something which is essentially produced by someone whose concern is with understanding the work.

I think that the quote shows what Morris owes us here. First, he needs to explain the mechanism of transmission of the intentional property of understanding from a performer to a performance. Second, he needs to formulate a suitable account of the concept of a property such that it will allow of intentional properties being properties not only of intentional agents but of other entities too. I think that both tasks lead to a minefield that is at least as dangerous as the one surrounding intentional reductionism. The reason is that both tasks boil down to the archetypal philosophical problem of how to bridge the gap between *res extensa* and *res cogitans*.

Conclusion

Michael Morris has formulated two related arguments against type-token view. The first argument relies, crucially, on deriving meaningfulness from intentionality. The other one relies on understanding intentionality as a sort of amphibian property that attaches not only to intentional agents but to other entities as well. Both related arguments seem to be stemming from Morris's belief that the relation between a musical work and its performance is essentially '*shot-through with intentionality*' (Morris 2007, 68), which is something a type-token theorist cannot account for.

The burden of this paper was to identify inner tensions and incoherencies in Morris's argument against a type-token view. Perhaps, none of our objections discussed in this paper are decisive but they, at least, point to an explanatory deficit of Morris's presentation of his argument.

As a matter of fact, and paradoxically, I agree with Morris that the relation between a musical work and its performance is an intentional

one. At the same time, however, this is something that, as I believe, must be presupposed from the start by any committed Platonist. Plato's philosophical myth of souls perceiving eternal types in the world of *ei-dos* prior to their incarnation describes this essential relation between eternal *types* and intentional agents – humans. Of course, to make this myth plausible we would have to formulate it in a contemporary rational language, perhaps, somewhere along the lines of Jungian archetypes or Chomskyan innate grammar.⁵ This is to say that Platonism (a version of a type-token view, as we have mentioned above) has theoretical resources to accommodate the intentionality that Morris, I think correctly, identifies in the relation between musical works and their performances.

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⁵ It is suggested by Karel Šebela.