



“Expectance” by Ivana Govorčin: A Micro-Story, its Semantic and Sound Potential¹

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Abstract

The poem “Expectance” was written by Serbian author Mirjana Stefanović (1939–2021) and was published in 1967 in the collection *Spring in Terazije*. Almost sixty years later, young composer Ivana Govorčin brought these verses to life musically by using, among other things, marked sound signifiers which direct the listener’s attention to the key points of the narrative flow.

The starting point of analysis is the poem itself, in which elements such as a humorous-ironic attitude towards life, stylistic figures of gradation and contrast, issues of borders, motifs of time and transience, and the finality of life are highlighted. This paper will point out the sound configurations which the composer uses as amplifiers of these elements and marked parts within the text, playing with their sound and semantic potential. For this purpose, the semiotic theory will be used to show how music acts “through” and thus “for” the narrative.

Keywords

markedness; time; micro-story; signifier; transience; sigh gesture / pianto.

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“Poetry is a composition of words set to music.”
Ezra Pound

Mirjana Stefanović (1939–2021) was a prominent Serbian writer, poet and journalist. She published the poem “Expectance” in 1967 in the collection *Spring in Terazije*. Serbian literary critic Dubravka Đukić considers the compiled poems to be constituted by procedures which are perhaps more appropriate to what critics call “socialist modernism.” Most of the songs are written in rhyme with a noticeable influence of folk poetry, as well as “an ironic reworking of a mythical pattern.”² Almost sixty years later, the poem “Expectance” has been brought to life musically by the young composer Ivana Govorčin.³ She used marked sound signifiers, i.e., musical gestures or figures, which stand out from the musical environment to emphasize the key points of the narrative flow and “underline musical meaning.” The starting point for my analysis is the poem itself, in which elements such as a humorous-ironic attitude towards life, stylistic figures of gradation and contrast, issues of borders, motifs of time and transience, and the finality of life are highlighted. As a next step of analysis, I will use the markedness and embodiment theory in order to point out how music corresponds to the poem’s discourse and how certain musical signifiers are deeply embedded in our cognitive processes, thus working “for” the narrative.

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² Saša Radojčić cited in Dubravka Đurić, “Modernizam u poeziji i ženska spisateljska pozicija: slučaj Mirjane Stefanović,” *Agon – časopis za poeziju* 13 (april–maj 2011).

³ Ivana Govorčin is a young and prominent Serbian composer. The solo song was written especially for a Masterclass for young composers led by composer Aleksandra Vrebalov within the ARSFID (Ars-Femina-Identitas) project in December 2023. The solo song was performed and recorded by soprano Radoslava Vorgić Žuržovan and pianist Nevena Sovtić, and is available on this YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ckjsutOV7Ko&list=RDckjsutOV7Ko&start_radio=1.

“Iščekivanje”

sedimo
danas lepo vreme
a zamislite juče
onolika kiša
one lapavice
na pivu je spala pena
na zavese je pala noć
na satu je prošla godina
zvezdom je minulo stoleće
mi sedimo
danas lepo vreme
a zamislite juče
onolika kiša
one lapavice
na pivu je pala pena
na nas je pala zemlja
pod njom sedimo
danas lepa kiša
a zamislite juče
onoliko vremena

“Expectance”

we sit
today the weather is nice
but imagine yesterday
all that rain
all that slush
the foam on the beer subsided
night fell on the curtains
a year passed on the clock
a century swept by with a star
we sit
today the weather is nice
but imagine yesterday
all that rain
all that slush
the foam on the beer subsided
the earth fell on us
we sit beneath it
today, the rain is lovely
but imagine yesterday
all that time

Basically, with just a few words this poem tells an entire story. It is genuinely captivating. The omission of capital letters and punctuation create a certain “equality between words,” making the text free of all “markers” which can simultaneously help the understanding of the meaning but could also hinder the narrative. Even so, one can easily discern two stanzas beginning with “sedimo”/“mi sedimo” (“we sit”), indicating the following structure: the first stanza consists of nine verses and the second consists of eight, while the last three verses summarize the previous text in a short reminiscence, which, as we shall see, will be structured musically as a Coda.

Foremost, it should be admitted that the translation of this poem was not at all easy and one might say even desirable due to the occurrence of polysemy and thus multiple possible interpretations,⁴ but we had in mind that we limited the readers in English. This is why all possible hidden meanings are further explained and consequently the translation/communication “noise” was, hopefully, significantly reduced.

⁴ I owe a great deal of gratitude and help for the translation of the poem to Sladana Aćimović and Evita Jović for proofreading.

The beginning of the poem already reveals the poetic persona with the word “sedimo” (“we sit”), indicating the first-person plural, gender neutral. At this moment, polysemy appears right away. In the Serbian language, the word “sedimo” means “sitting position, to sit,” but can also mean that we are “turning gray,” i.e., “we grow old.”⁵ This double meaning will be clearly presented within the music and somehow reinforced by dramaturgical means. Moving forward, we come across a stylistic figure of contrast: “danas – juče” (“today – yesterday”), “lepo vreme – kiša” (“nice weather – rain”), and a stylistic figure of gradation: “kiša – lapavice” (“rain – slush”). The motif of *time*, which is only hinted at by the opening words “danas – juče” (“today – yesterday”), as well as in the title of the poem, will appear to be the main isotopy. The aforementioned is already confirmed by the next four verses, “na pivu je spala pena, na zavese je pala noć, na satu je prošla godina, zvezdom je minulo stoleće” (“the foam on the beer subsided, night fell on the curtains, a year passed on the clock, a century swept by with a star”). This brings about an elaborated stylistic figure of gradation, reinforcing the basic motif of the poem: *the transience of time*, that is, *of life*. The gradation is achieved by a picturesque description of time, starting with how long it takes for the *foam to fall* on the beer (which largely depends, one would say, on the quality of the drink), to *one night, a year, or a century*. Turning back to the word “sedimo,” we can easily discern that both meanings can actually refer to the same main motif: *the transience of time. We sit while time passes. We grow old while time passes*. I will only mention here one specific element, as I can easily turn back to it when talking about the musical setting of the poem. The composer Ivana Govorčin will introduce the word “godina” (a year) in a more subjectified manner within the musical version, by marking it with a *sigh gesture* or *sigh motif* according to Ratner’s topical vocabulary, or *pianto* if we follow Baroque rhetoric. Later on, we will check how conscious this decision was, and/or how culturally and physically embedded it is in (our) cognition.

The second stanza begins with a repetition of the first five lines of the first stanza along with an addition of the word “mi,” i.e., “**mi** sedimo” (“**we** sit”)⁶ at the beginning. According to Yuri Lotman, this type of equivalence is a semantic

⁵ The difference in meaning appears in the pronunciation, that is, in the accentuation of the word, but there is no orthographic difference between them. In the first case, with the meaning of “sitting position” or “we sit” the pronunciation of the word is short, especially with the vowel “e” – /sédimo/, or, alternatively with no change in meaning, it can be pronounced with a long rising accent on the second syllable, the vowel “i” – /sedímo/. In the second case, the meaning “we are turning gray,” or “we are aging” the word is pronounced with a long rising accent on the first syllable, that is on the vowel “e” – /sédímo/.

⁶ In Serbian, personal pronouns can be introduced without their direct mention through verb conjugation. This is done in the first stanza of the poem, while in the second, the personal pronoun – the first person plural – is also directly mentioned.

paradigm, because it is about a repetition on the supra-verse level.⁷ Its effect occurs when a sequel does not offer the expected verses, but instead: “na pivu je pala pena, na nas je pala zemlja, pod njom sedimo” (“the foam on the beer subsided, the earth fell on us, we sit beneath it”). In relation to the first stanza, the intervention is made. Namely, the verse “the foam on the beer subsided” is a representation of a short time, but the following verses of gradation are omitted from the first stanza, thus creating a stylistic figure of *ellipsis*⁸ so the effect of the culmination in the verses “the earth fell on us, we sit beneath it” would be even stronger. In the end, the poem takes on a new meaning – *underground we sit* – could certainly mean *we are dead*. Although these verses offer multiple readings, they also open up the question of the transcendence of life and death and imply the odd personification not with inanimate things but with inanimate people. The poem turns towards the beginning as the first stanza now also receives a new reading. We encounter grotesque images of dead people talking, probably in a cemetery covered with earth. Govorčin’s music fully corresponds to the grotesque aspect of this image by following the mystical and occasionally ironic tone of the poem.

Here it seems useful to briefly refer to the concept of a border, which is important in all literary forms since this type of space is directly linked to a type of personality or persona. Here, Lotman’s interpretation that “the fulfillment of a norm does not represent an event”⁹ is intriguing. Based on this concept, texts can be divided into non-narrative (where the characters are static) and narrative (where the characters are dynamic). The verses in which we are informed that *someone sits underground*, implies that the poetic “we” persona crosses the border of life and *the event* appears. Following the ideas of the great historian, writer and philosopher Mircea Eliade who wrote on the symbolism of the border concept, Radoje Đokić concludes:

The question of the crossing is also a question of the border. The boundary is always a challenge, both for entities which touch each other and for those which are distant from each other. At the border, something ends and something begins. It is hard to resist the knowledge that every flow, fluidity and continuity tends towards a limit, i.e. a kind of space where appropriate ideas, energies, drives, systems of knowledge and emotions are exhausted. A border is also the end of a flow, but this does not mean that with it everything is exhausted, or that there lies the weakest activity of internal energies. It is often the case that great power

⁷ Jurij Lotman, *Struktura umetničkog teksta* (Beograd: Akademska knjiga, 2022).

⁸ Gr. ἔλλειψις, *élleipsis* = omission. A figure of speech which refers to the omission of words or parts of a text for dramatic effect. It is often used in our everyday speech to save time and get to the point more quickly. The same situation occurs in these verses.

⁹ Lotman, *Struktura umetničkog teksta*.

is condensed at the border, with a pronounced tendency to outpour beyond the borders. The border is not the end either, because it can be close to the center, or can even be the center itself.¹⁰

The last three verses of Stefanović's poem: "danas lepa kiša, a zamislite juče, onoliko vremena" ("today, the rain is lovely, but imagine yesterday, all that time") are brief reminiscences which function at the synecdochical level. With a hint of irony, we find out today is "lepa kiša" ("lovely rain") – until then it was only nice, lovely weather – the contrast and time relation appears again: "danas – juče" ("today – yesterday") and also presents itself within probably the most semantically intriguing lines: "onoliko vremena" ("all that time"). Here, the poet plays wonderfully with the homonymy – the word "vreme" can be translated as "weather" or as "time," and the meaning depends exclusively on the context, not on the pronunciation.¹¹ In this case, however, the reader is also involved in a grammatical game. Namely, due to the previous two verses which were about rain, the meaning would rather go in the direction of interpreting "vreme" as "weather," while grammatically it is never used in the way as it appears in the poem – that is, in the plural form. So it is more appropriate, although not reducible to translate "vreme" as "time" at the very end of the poem.

In addition, it cannot be denied that the poet shows a keen sense of humor: the mention of beer in relation to time, dead people talking about the weather (this "small talk" could be interpreted as a sign of casual chat, formal politeness or even boredom), and the ironic syntagm of "lovely rain."

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When it comes to the musical setting, the composer's choices follow the tone of the poem's discourse with minuteness. Ivana Govorčin uses very similar minimal means which correspond to the text, thus creating an atmosphere of the "slow" passing of time and an embodiment of a modality of "being." *Adagio meno mosso, poco rubato, calmo*, redundant use of pauses and fermatas, repetition of arpeggiated chords and soft dynamics are all musical signifiers of a "slow" time of "Expectance." Further, the musical gradation follows the course of the textual gradation (it could be captured in the right hand of the piano part from C to F at the

¹⁰ Radoje Đokić, *Znak i simbol* (Beograd: Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva, 2003), 263. Translation from Serbian N. C.

¹¹ In the Serbian language, the meaning of homonyms strongly depends on the context, that is, on the syntagm. There is no difference between homographs – words that have the same spelling – or homophones – words that have the same pronunciation, as in some other languages. All homonyms in the Serbian language are written the same.

very beginning): see Example 1. The dysphoric element is featured immediately: “Whether in popular or historical art music, it reaches listeners through such unmistakable signs as a slower tempo, soft dynamics, a minor mode, and typical gestures such as the *pianto* or the *passus duriusculus*, or a general tendency downwards of the melody.”¹² Joan Grimalt concludes that for analytical purposes, but even more so for performative practice, is useful to qualify a passage or a gesture as *dysphoric* or *euphoric* (ibid.). Indeed, the performance of the song offers a specific rhetorical tone at the beginning, initiated not only by the brevity of the poem, but mostly by the beginning which includes “we.” Namely, the first seven lines of the poem are performed as a “real” conversation between the accompanist and the singer, so the song begins as an everyday chat between two friends, very friendly and naïve. The composer’s instructions indicate this: “note values without note heads indicate an approximate pronunciation rhythm that does not have to be strictly understood as long as the pronunciation is expressive, in the natural volume of speech, resembling a simple everyday dialogue between singer and pianist.” This decision, to start the song with a speech (*recitativo*) and gradually develop into an operatic *arioso*, will, however, greatly affect the dramatization of the musical discourse.

¹² Joan Grimalt, *Analysing Musical Signification: A Hermeneutic, Rhetorical Approach to Western Art Music* (Cham: Springer, 2026), 134. For the opposition between a dysphoric and a euphoric tone in music, see: Márta Grabócz, “The Demiurge of Sounds and the *Poeta Doctus*: Poetics and Works of François-Bernard Mâche,” in *Music, Society and Imagination in Contemporary France*, ed. François-Bernard Mâche, *Contemporary Music Review*, vol. 8, part 1 (London and New York: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1993), 131–82; Eero Tarasti, *A Theory of Musical Semiotics* (Indiana University Press, 1994); Joan Grimalt, *Mapping Musical Signification*. (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020); Grimalt, *Analysing Musical Signification*.

Example 1 Govorčin, *Iščekivanje*: beginning.

Adagio meno mosso, poco rubato, calmo *mf* ³

Soprano

Se-di-mo...
We sit

Piano

p

3 3 3 3 simile...

5

S.

Today the weather is nice...
mf Da-nas le-po vre-me... A za-mis-li-te
But imagine

Pno.

mp

8

S.

ju - če... o - no - li - ka ki - ša... o - ne la - pa - vi - ce...
yesterday... All that rain... All that slush...

Pno.

mp

11

S.

Na pi-vu je spa-la pe-na... Na za-ve-se je pa-la noć...
The foam on the beer subsided... Night fell on the curtains...

Pno.

p

The musical score is presented in four systems. Each system consists of a vocal line (Soprano or Soprano) and a piano accompaniment (Piano or Pno.). The tempo and mood are indicated as 'Adagio meno mosso, poco rubato, calmo'. The first system (measures 1-4) features a soprano line with lyrics 'Se-di-mo... We sit' and a piano accompaniment with a dynamic of 'p' and a triplet of eighth notes. The second system (measures 5-7) has a soprano line with lyrics 'Today the weather is nice... Da-nas le-po vre-me... A za-mis-li-te But imagine' and a piano accompaniment with a dynamic of 'mp'. The third system (measures 8-10) continues the piano accompaniment with lyrics 'ju - če... o - no - li - ka ki - ša... o - ne la - pa - vi - ce... yesterday... All that rain... All that slush...'. The fourth system (measures 11-13) features a soprano line with lyrics 'Na pi-vu je spa-la pe-na... Na za-ve-se je pa-la noć... The foam on the beer subsided... Night fell on the curtains...' and a piano accompaniment with a dynamic of 'p'. The piano accompaniment throughout consists of a steady, upward arpeggiated chord pattern.

The boredom, which we already noticed within the lyrics, is embodied by musical discourse through the repetition of upward arpeggiated chords which always end

on the so-called gesture of “under fermata,” “frozen motion” or “posture”¹³ as an implied gesture of a musical persona. This dysphoric element is one of the most common rhetorical gestures of disruption with a sad, almost tragic character (sometimes appearing as a series of fermatas).¹⁴

To explain the use of musical signifiers which mark some important parts of the text, I will use the markedness theory.¹⁵ It is a qualitative theory of oppositional binary relations, most broadly defined as “the value given to difference.”¹⁶ The theory is based on opposing pairs which are very common in language: man/woman, happy/sad, white/black etc. where the oppositions are not of equal weight. The unmarked term is primary and is given priority, while the marked term is treated as secondary. Thus, the unmarked term is often used as a general term, while the marked term is used in a more specific way. Although this idea is based in linguistics, it was soon recognized as a universal concept which can contribute to a better understanding and conceptualization of life. In this regard, American linguist Edwin Battistella wrote:

¹³ Robert Hatten, *Interpreting Musical Gestures, Topics and Tropes* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 126.

¹⁴ For more on the rhetorical gesture of disruption see: Hatten, *Interpreting Musical Gestures, Topics and Tropes*, 156.

¹⁵ For more on markedness theory, see: Edwin Battistella, *Markedness: The Evaluative Superstructure of Language* (State University of New York Press, 1990); Edwin Battistella, *The Logic of Markedness* (Oxford University Press, 1996); Joseph G. Greenberg, *Language Universals* (Mouton & Co., 1966); Jeanette K. Gundel, Kathleen Houlihan, and Gerald A. Sanders, “Markedness and Distribution in Phonology and Syntax,” in *Markedness*, ed. Fred R. Eckman, Edith A. Moravcsik, and Jessica R. Wirth (Berlin: Springer, 1986); Anatoly Liberman, “Phonological Markedness and a Plea for Useful Linguistics,” in *Toward a Calculus of Meaning: Studies in Markedness, Distinctive Features, and Deixis*, ed. Edna Andrews and Yishai Tobin (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1996); Madeleine Newfield and Linda R. Waugh, “Invariance and Markedness in Grammatical Categories,” in *New Vistas in Grammar: Invariance and Variation*, ed. Linda R. Waugh and Stephen Rudy (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1991); Rodney B. Sangster, “Two Types of Markedness and Their Implications for the Conceptualization of Grammatical Invariance,” in *New Vistas in Grammar: Invariance and Variation*, ed. Linda R. Waugh and Stephen Rudy (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1991); Michael Shapiro, “Explorations into Markedness,” *Language* 48, no. 2 (1972): 343–364; Michael Shapiro, *The Sense of Grammar: Language as Semiotic* (Indiana University Press, 1983); Nikolai Sergeevich Trubetzkoy, *Principles of Phonology*, trans. Christine A. M. Baltaxe (University of California Press, 1969); Linda R. Waugh, “Marked and unmarked: A choice between unequals in semiotic structure,” *Semiotica* 38, nos. 3–4 (1982): 299–318.

¹⁶ This concept was developed in the Prague School of Linguistics in the 1930s by Nikolai Trubetzkoy (1890–1938) who was the first to apply the terms *marked* and *unmarked* to his research on phonological correlations. However, the most extensive elaboration of markedness theory would be done by Roman Jakobson regarding morphology and syntax, along with Noam Chomsky (1928–) for generative grammar.

(a) possible extension of markedness would be to explore the idea of parameters in domains other than language; while this has not yet (to my knowledge) been attempted, it is worth investigating whether we can construct core grammars for such domains as music, delineating marked and unmarked parameters of music appreciation or performance.¹⁷

The concept of markedness was first applied to music theory by Robert Hatten in his doctoral dissertation (1982) and further elaborated in his first book *Musical Meaning in Beethoven: Markedness, Correlation, and Interpretation* (1994). One of the major claims of his book is that markedness “underlies both *musical meaning* and *stylistic growth*”¹⁸ which he presented through studies of type/token and stylistic/strategic competences relation.¹⁹ Namely, Hatten demonstrated that in music, similar to language, markedness values can change. The dynamic asymmetry of oppositions suggests “a natural *growth* process, by means of which styles carve out new niches of meaning by marking new features in creative tokens to form subtypes of the parent type.”²⁰ The “meaning (the niche) and growth (its novelty) are inextricably linked in the model of markedness, since that which is new is marked, and the niche is more narrowly constrained in its meaning relative to the meaning of the parent type. Whereas the parent type may have originally been marked, it is now unmarked with respect to the new subtype.”²¹ One of the best examples derives from Hatten’s explanation of how the Picardy third functions as a marked element, namely a *token* through extensive usage in the Baroque which becomes unmarked – a *stylistic type*. So then, the marked value becomes a situation in which the Picardy third is actually lacking in minor movements.²²

In Govorčin’s song we easily discern the other function of marked which “underline musical meaning” on the word “sedimo” (“we sit, turning gray”) (b. 21). Before the marked element appears, the unmarked interval of a minor third (b. 18), then a minor second (b. 20) is used, and then a marked interval of a diminished third on the same word (b. 21) appears, marking the double meaning

¹⁷ Battistella, *Markedness*, 133.

¹⁸ The emphasis is mine. For further reading on the theoretical concept of markedness, see: Robert Hatten, *Musical Meaning in Beethoven: Markedness, Correlation, and Interpretation Advances in Semiotics* (Indiana University Press, 1994), 2nd chapter, 29–66; Hatten, *Interpreting Musical Gestures, Topics and Tropes*, chapter 1, 21–89; Robert Hatten, *A Theory of Virtual Agency for Western Art Music* (Indiana University Press, 2018), 73, 180–182, 273, 285.

¹⁹ For detailed elaboration of markedness in music, see Hatten, *Musical Meaning in Beethoven*; Hatten, *Interpreting Musical Gestures, Topics and Tropes* and Hatten, *A Theory of Virtual Agency for Western Art Music*; Nataša Crnjanski, “What Is Marked and What Is Not? Privative Opposition in Music,” *Časopis za muzičku kulturu Muzika* 28, no. 2 (2024): 91–130.

²⁰ Hatten, *Interpreting Musical Gestures, Topics and Tropes*, 12.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Hatten, *Musical Meaning in Beethoven*, 39, 40.

of the word even more effectively: see Example 2. This third invocation includes melodic variants of the word “sedimo” with three emphatically varied repetitions, close to the traditional rhetorical figure of *diaphora*.²³ We could argue here that the unmarked intervals are used for the conventional or the more obvious meaning of the word, while the marked interval is used for the more specific, narrower meaning. “Such oppositions are weighted with respect to some feature that is distinctive for the opposition. Thus, the two terms of an opposition will have an unequal value or asymmetry, of marked versus unmarked, that has consequences for the meaning of each term.”²⁴ But, firstly we shall ask why this diminished third is a marked element of the musical narration anyway? Why do we perceive it as such? Taking into account the Aeolian mode in F²⁵ and its tonal content used thoroughly in the song, the diminished third interval between the II and the lowered IV degree (double flattened B) appears to be a marked interval. Thus, in the repetition of the word, Govorčin marked the motif and inflected it with chromaticism which therefore narrowed the meaning.

Example 2 Govorčin, *Iščekivanje*: bar 18–23.

The image shows a musical score for two systems of music. The first system covers bars 18-20, and the second system covers bars 21-23. Each system has a vocal line (S.) and a piano accompaniment (Pno.).

System 1 (Bars 18-20):
 - **Bar 18:** Vocal line starts with a quarter note G4, followed by a quarter rest, then a quarter note A4, and a quarter note Bb4. The piano accompaniment has a bass line with a quarter note Bb3, a quarter note A3, and a quarter note G3. Dynamic marking: *mp*.
 - **Bar 19:** Vocal line has a half note G4. The piano accompaniment has a bass line with a quarter note Bb3, a quarter note A3, and a quarter note G3. Dynamic marking: *mp*.
 - **Bar 20:** Vocal line has a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note Bb4. The piano accompaniment has a bass line with a quarter note Bb3, a quarter note A3, and a quarter note G3. Dynamic marking: *mp*.
 - **Lyrics:** "Se - di - mo, se - di - We sit We"

System 2 (Bars 21-23):
 - **Bar 21:** Vocal line starts with a quarter note G4, followed by a quarter note A4, and a quarter note Bb4. The piano accompaniment has a bass line with a quarter note Bb3, a quarter note A3, and a quarter note G3. Dynamic marking: *mf*.
 - **Bar 22:** Vocal line has a half note G4. The piano accompaniment has a bass line with a quarter note Bb3, a quarter note A3, and a quarter note G3. Dynamic marking: *mf*.
 - **Bar 23:** Vocal line has a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note Bb4. The piano accompaniment has a bass line with a quarter note Bb3, a quarter note A3, and a quarter note G3. Dynamic marking: *mf*.
 - **Lyrics:** "mo, se - di - mo... sit, we sit... (turning gray)"

²³ See Grimalt, *Analysing Musical Signification*. The diaphora is part of the rhetorical figures of repetition, that is, those which reiterate some element of the written text, such as anaphora, polysyndeton, parallelism, pun and paronomasia. The repetition of the same word can have different meanings or nuances.

²⁴ Hatten, *Musical Meaning in Beethoven*, 34.

²⁵ The Aeolian mode in F is presented without key signatures.

It was already mentioned that the composer musically marks the word “godina” (“a year”) (b. 33) by using a figure known from musical historiography as *pianto*, the *sigh motif*, or according to embodiment theory – the *sigh gesture*: see Example 3. The significance of this figure is best seen by its presence in compositions from the 16th century to the present day, which led Leonard Ratner to also introduce it into the list of topics (1980). In Baroque rhetoric, the presence of this falling chromatic movement implied sadness, mourning, tears, and even death.²⁶ Although there are important theoretical discussions based on the assumption that there was a terminological confusion in the renaming of the *pianto* (it. “pianto = crying”) figure to the *sigh motif*, I previously argued that these names actually belong to the same category of meaning.²⁷ Namely, Adolph Bernhard Marx mistranslated the German name for *pianto* – Seufzer (“sigh”), by the Italian name *sospiro*.²⁸ In addition, Mannheim composers often used this figure in their works, so German musicologist Hugo Riemann, following Marx, (re)named it the *Mannheim sigh* (Ger. Mannheimer Seufzer). Even though it was made out of a terminological confusion, from the perspective of embodiment theory, it is not entirely wrong. According to this theory, “crying” and “sighing” should not be categorically separated, because both contain the isomorphism of a downward movement – tears fall, and sighing cannot be the other way around, so both carry references to sadness and grief. Moreover, according to the investigation of embodiment in cognitive linguistics, through a number of psychological

²⁶ Some theoreticians see *pianto* as a figure derived from *passus duriusculus*, which both fall into the same category of meaning, that is, grief or sadness.

²⁷ Nataša Crnjanski, “*Passus balcanicus* ili tužna muzika ima silaznu putanju: Prilog proučavanju Mokranjčevih rukoveti,” *Časopis za muzičku kulturu Muzika* 27, no. 1 (2023): 7–45. Ratner calls these musical signs *topics* and talks about them as “subjects for musical discourse,” see Leonard Ratner, *Classic Music: Expression, Form and Style* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1980), 9. He divides the topics into three categories: dances, styles and examples of tone painting. When it comes to the terminology for the subject of the *sigh motif*, several variant names are found: *Empfindsamer sigh* (Hatten, *Musical Meaning in Beethoven*; Hatten, *Interpreting Musical Gestures, Topics and Tropes*) or *sigh gesture*, see Robert Hatten, “Four Semiotic Approaches to Musical Meaning: Markedness, Topics, Tropes, and Gesture,” *Musicological Annual* 41, no. 1 (December 2005): 5–30, even the original *pianto* (tear) (Hatten, *A Theory of Virtual Agency for Western Art Music*), as well as the *appoggiatura sigh*, see Vladimir Karbusicky, *Grundriss der musikalischen Semantik* (Darmstadt: Wiss. Buchges, 1986).

²⁸ Monelle and Grimalt point out that the two madrigalisms *sospiro* (sigh) and *pianto* (cry) have separate meanings. As already stated, the mistake is attributed to Adolph Bernhard Marx who mistranslated the German name for *pianto* – Seufzer (“sigh”) with the Italian name *sospiro*, which leads to an undesirable synonymy. Cf. Raymond Monelle, *The Sense of Music: Semiotic Essays* (Princeton University Press, 2000), 17, 66–69, 73–75; Raymond Monelle, *The Musical Topic: Hunt, Military, and Pastoral* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 4, 5, 19, 24, 80, 273; Grimalt, “Poučavanje glazbenoga značenja,” *Theoria* xxi, 20 (2019): 11–28; Grimalt, *Mapping Musical Signification*, 31–36.

experiments, the conceptual metaphor of *every sadness has a downward path* has been confirmed, indicating that both terms are completely suitable for the same musical signifier.²⁹

Example 3 Govorčin, *Iščekivanje*: bars 30–35.

30 *f* *mf* *mp*
 S. Na pi-vu je spa-la pe-na, na za-ve-se je pa-la noć, na
 The foam on the beer subsided, night fell on the curtains, A
 Pno. *mf*
 33 *p* *mp*
 S. sa-tu je proš-la go-di-na... Zvez-dom je mi-nu-lo sto-le-će...
 year passed on the clock... A century swept by with the star...
 Pno. *p* *mp*

Although Monelle does not refer to embodiment theory, he concludes that the descending minor second optimally portrays the idea of lamentation. In his opinion, it essentially belongs to the domain of symbols, although it has both iconic and indexical characteristics. The iconic sign is in relation to its object – it imitates someone who wails in tears, but it is also an indexical sign in terms of the final meaning (indexicality of the object), denoting the emotions associated with one type of crying.³⁰ However, Monelle’s interpretation leads to the conclusion that the *pianto* is an arbitrary symbol which changed its meaning from crying

²⁹ On conceptual metaphors see more: George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

³⁰ Monelle, *The Sense of Music*, 17.

to sighing.³¹ When considering this musical sign from the perspective of the theory of embodiment, one still comes to the conclusion that it is not arbitrary because the relationship between its signifier and the signified is motivated. In other words, this iconic musical sign is “deeply embedded in our cognitive processes, which makes it a universal phenomenon in different historical-cultural contexts”³² on the basis of which it can be used without the text in an abstract form – as a pure musical meaning.³³

Obviously, the chromatic downstep movement on the word “godina” (“a year”) in “Expectance” is denoting a *lament over the past years*, in other words, *over life*. But, again, why is this figure a marked element of the musical narration? Taking into account the Aeolian mode in F, the pitch E only appears on the word “godina” in the composition, yet it does not belong to the scale. In the plagal atmosphere of the Aeolian mode or Aeolian “grammar,” this chromatic step is perceived as marked, unconventional and agrammatical. To put it in Roman Jakobson’s words, there is an asymmetrical opposition between the E flat and the E. In this asymmetrical relation, the pitch E signalizes a certain property, while the unmarked member of the opposition displays a “non-signalization of that property.”³⁴ The prominent linguist George Lakoff sees markedness as “an asymmetry in a category, where one member or subcategory is taken to be somehow more basic than the other (or others).”³⁵ In essence, the unmarked is more widely distributed, frequent, and/or simpler, and/or more richly elaborated, as well as

³¹ Ibid., 73. Karbusicky talks about the expressive symbol (*Ausdrucksymbol*). He believes that there is a transition of the index (physical sigh, a sign of sadness) into a symbol. Namely, something that was primarily an iconic sign of a sigh, is now an index or an association of a sigh, because it becomes a system-bound expression, a “lexical unit” (Karbusicky, *Grundriss der musikalischen Semantik*; cf. Monelle, *The Sense of Music*).

³² Nataša Crnjanski, “*Gest uzdaha u Mokranjčevim rukovetima*,” *Mokranjac, časopis za kulturu*, 22 (2020): 2–16, 7.

³³ Another interpretation of this figure by Robert Hatten should be mentioned here. In addition to calling this figure the *Empfindsamer sigh gesture*, which is an expression of deep sentiment associated with the sensitive style of the 18th century, another meaning is a *galant* gesture of grace which is analogous to a formal social bow in aristocratic circles (French: *faire une révérence*) and appears in gallant, appoggiatura cadences. Hatten points out that such cadences are even inaccurately termed “feminine” because the gallant ending on the weak beat captures the qualitative character of all gracious social gesturing in the eighteenth century, male and female alike (cf. Hatten, *Interpreting Musical Gestures, Topics and Tropes*, 140; “Four Semiotic Approaches to Musical Meaning,” 18). In these regards, both interpretations are grounded in the theory of embodiment.

³⁴ Roman Jakobson, “Zur Struktur des russischen Verbumb” (“On the Structure of the Russian Verb”) (Pražský Linguistický Kroužek, 1932), 12.

³⁵ George Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal About the Mind* (University of Chicago Press, 1987), 60.

less limited in its contextual variation.³⁶ In this context, the minor second and third, as well as the pitch of E flat are more basic, distributed, simpler, and more elaborated in the Aeolian mode than the diminished third and the pitch E.³⁷

It should be noted that the effect of the lamentation is extended by a pause in the voice in the following bar (b. 34). This is a rhetorical gesture which has the exact same dramatic effect as in speech. The effect of the marked element can be seen (b. 37) on the word “sedimo” (“we sit”) from where the pulse suddenly changes and the rhythm becomes syncopated and more agile. This contrast in the accompaniment between “plucked strings” and dance-like chords suggests a juxtaposition between the intimate, individual setting of the song and a more public, opera-like atmosphere.³⁸ This, however, differs from the typical conflict between *Moi* and *Soi* (Me and Society) commonly found in 19th-century music repertoire. Instead, it reflects the reconciliation of two narrative types: one being an intimate, retrospective monologue by the persona, and the other directed outward, addressed to others.

³⁶ Another important feature of marked elements is *informativeness*, which is exactly what Catherine Chvany identifies as a “key word uniting all kinds of markedness,” see Catherine Chvany, “Backgrounded Perfective and Plot-Line Imperfectives: Toward a Theory of Grounding in Text,” in *The Scope of Slavic Aspect*, ed. Michael S. Flier and Alan Timberlake (Columbus, OH: Slavica Publishers, 1985), 248. Observing from the position of information theory, we could argue that staying in the unmarked zone strengthens redundancy, whereby “communication [...] is more signifying, socialized and coded; if the redundancy is less, communication contains a greater amount of information, it is more open, more individualized and more coded,” see Pjer Giro, *Semiologija* (Beograd: Plato, 2001), 18. This is exactly how marked elements affect texts, enriching them with new information and making them “warmer” as messages. “McLuhan divides the media into hot and cool, i.e., ‘hot’ and ‘cold;’ terms refer in technical jargon to what is called information temperature or, in photography, the ‘definition’ of an image. The more elements of information a specific message contains, the denser the information of the substance is, the warmer the message, and vice versa. The temperature of the message should be distinguished from its referential content [...]” Giro, *Semiologija*, 22.

³⁷ Interestingly, until the end of the composition, a total of 11 pitch classes are used. Only the pitch B is missing, which would close the aggregate. It is in polar relation with the pitch F, finalis. That would be a new oppositional pair.

³⁸ Thanks to Joan Grimalt for remarking this.

Example 4 Govorčin, *Iščekivanje*: bars 36–40.

36 *mp* *mf* *mp*

S. ————— Mi se - di - mo, —————
 We sit (turning gray)

Pno. *p* *mp* *mf*

It was already mentioned that in the voice there is a progression from *speaking* (no singing), through recitative, to operatic *arioso*. This crescendo in the voice's tone is accompanied by increasing intensity and dynamics, culminating in a moment which could represent a *golden mean*, followed by a shorter diminuendo. This process of a long *growth* phase and a brief *decline* functions as an important dramaturgical device.³⁹

I will also point out the climax (b. 53–60) which reinforces the text with a semantic reversal: “the earth has fallen on us, we are sitting under it.” This is followed by *saltus duriusculus* – the exclamative sense of the septime leap over a third, where the word “zemlja” (“the earth”) receives the highest note in the song (F5). This culmination is reinforced by the dynamics and the prolonged pitch of C5. Minor thirds, which are so often used in the style of blues, are redundantly present, creating an association with grief, melancholy and sadness.⁴⁰ In addition, the dysphoric character of the musical discourse could also be seen within the flat side of the utilized tonality. With no occurrence of sharps throughout the song, this might be considered as a principle of pastoral expression in music, that is, a *mollified tension and intensity*,⁴¹ which brings here a certain dose of loneliness and melancholy.

³⁹ Thanks to Joan Grimalt for remarking this.

⁴⁰ The term Blues may have originated from “blue devils,” meaning melancholy and sadness.

⁴¹ Hatten, *Interpreting Musical Gestures, Topics and Tropes*, 56.

Example 5 Govorčin, *Iščekivanje*: bars 53–60.

53 *f* *f*

S. pe-na, na nas je pa-la zem-lja, pod njom se-di
 subsided, the earth fell on us, We sit beneath

Pno. *mp* *f* *f*

58 *ff* *mf* *mf* *p*

S. mo, se-di - mo.
 it, We sit.

Pno. *f* *mf*

The Coda (b. 67) reveals the final intriguing line: “onoliko vremena” (“all that time”) (b. 74) which is highlighted with a fermata as an iconic representation of the “long time.” The song ends ambiguously since Govorčin decided to omit the resolution chord which had been presented in the first version so she could more effectively underline the ambiguity of the words.

Example 6 Govorčin, *Iščekivanje*: bars 73–77.

73 *p* *pp*

S. o-no-li - ko vre-me - na...
 All that time...

Pno. *p* *p*

In order to check some of my assumptions, I interviewed the composer Ivana Govorčin. She confirmed to me the dramaturgical function of the introduction in which the soloist and the accompanist are chatting. “From the beginning, casual conversation leads to restlessness, which arises from repetition and further consideration of the started topic, which increasingly grows into a serious philosophy of life.” It was particularly interesting to me that she used the *piano/sigh gesture* without previous knowledge of its meaning: “It was conceived as a depiction of the transience of time that seems to *leak* and slip out of our hands.” Her words further confirmed that the *piano/sigh gesture* was not an arbitrary sign but was rather clearly motivated because the word “leak” which Govorčin used as a depiction also has an isomorphy of downward movement, just as the conceptual metaphor and embodiment theory suggest.

Although my analysis focused on both the theory of markedness and the embodiment theory which shed light on the semantic connection between music and text, the most interesting aspect of this song actually lies not in what is said, but in *what is not said*, which is the true beauty and essence of the micro-story. For me, the song is akin to the micro-story and stylistic experiment of writers to create impressive micro-narration which manages to convey all the cruelty, diversity and unease of the world around them in just a few sentences, paragraphs or stanzas, often in a more effective way than in longer narratives. Ivana Govorčin succeeded in using marked sound signifiers to highlight the most important key points of the narrative flow, while also resisting to comment musically on the text and to load it with new meanings. In order to follow the tone of the poem’s discourse, she left that “unspoken,” the non-verbal rest, to the intersubjectivity and indefinability of the listeners.

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