

Song Acts

Twelve Songs to Texts from Ezra Pound

For Mezzo Soprano, Baritone, and Piano

Book II: Erat Hora [An Hour There Was]

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Song Acts is a hybrid work, half a choreographed song cycle and half a musical drama enacted in twelve songs. The “libretto” is drawn from the early poetry of Ezra Pound; the work seeks to compress the impassioned action typical of opera into a series of simple movements and gestures without an explicit narrative, much as the poems seek to compress historical experience into a sequence of free-floating images.

Writing in the early twentieth century, Pound took up the traditional topics of love and war to articulate and also to counter the feeling, widespread at the time, that modernity had caused experience to lose its depth and become merely a series of shocks and impressions. As Walter Benjamin famously expressed it, life felt as if human beings had fallen off the calendar. The result on one hand was a loss of the sense of the numinous that once touched everyday life and, on the other, the collective folly that allowed the catastrophe of the First World War. These issues are with us again, in new and perhaps more dangerous forms than in their first iteration, so it seemed more than timely to view the early years of the present century through the prism of their counterparts in the last.

The work resists synopsis because keeping narrative at a remove is one of its aims; the idea is to preserve the narrative dimension without telling a particular story. But the basic action involves the vicissitudes of meeting and parting, separation and reunion, intimacy and distance between romantic partners. The fate of the couple, however, becomes significant not only (or not primarily) in its own right but as an embodiment of the possibility of authentic human bonds in an era that is at best indifferent to them and at worst brutally hostile.

Song Acts consists of two books, which may be performed either as independent cycles or in sequence to form the full cycle. Book I, *Angels of Wind and Fire* (six songs, eighteen minutes) turns on the vicissitudes of desire, separation, and reunion. Book II, *Erat Hora* (six songs, twenty-one minutes) dwells on the question of how, in the words of W. H. Auden, to “show an affirming flame” amid dark memories and darker events. The title songs may also be performed independently.

All texts are in the public domain.

1. In a Station of the Metro

The apparition of these faces in the crowd:
Petals on a wet, black bough.

2. April

Three spirits came to me
And drew me apart
To where the olive boughs
Lay stripped upon the ground:
Pale carnage beneath bright mist.

3. *Hugh Selwyn Mauberly, IV*

These fought, in any case,
and some believing, pro domo, in any case ..

Some quick to arm,
some for adventure,
some from fear of weakness,
some from fear of censure,
some for love of slaughter, in imagination,
learning later ...

some in fear, learning love of slaughter;
Died some pro patria, non dulce non et décor...

walked eye-deep in hell
believing in old men's lies, then unbelieving
came home, home to a lie,
home to many deceits,
home to old lies and new infamy;

usury age-old and age-thick
and liars in public places.

Daring as never before, wastage as never before.
Young blood and high blood,
Fair cheeks, and fine bodies;

fortitude as never before

frankness as never before,
disillusions as never told in the old days,
hysterias, trench confessions,
laughter out of dead bellies.

4. Erat Hora [An Hour There Was]

"Thank you, whatever comes." And then she turned
And, as the ray of sun on hanging flowers
Fades when the wind hath lifted them aside,
Went swiftly from me. Nay, whatever comes,
One hour was sunlit and the most high gods
May not make boast of any better thing
Than to have watched that hour as it passed.

5. Doria

Be in me as the eternal moods
 of the bleak wind, and not
As transient things are—
 gaiety of flowers.
Have me in the strong loneliness
 of sunless cliffs
And of gray waters.
 Let the gods speak softly of us
In days hereafter,
 The shadowy flowers of Orcus
Remember thee.

6. The Coming of War: Actaeon

An image of Lethe,
 and the fields
Full of faint light
 but golden,
Gray cliffs,
 and beneath them
A sea
Harsher than granite,
 unstill, never ceasing;
High forms
 with the movement of gods,
Perilous aspect;
 And one said:
"This is Actaeon."
 Actaeon of [the] golden greaves!
Over fair meadows,
Over the cool face of that field,
Unstill, ever moving,
Hosts of an ancient people,
The silent cortège.

In a Station of the Metro

♩ = 66

From offstage: ♩ = 60

Soprano

oh _____ Turns head toward source of voice.

Baritone

Piano

ppp

Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. *

7

♩ = 66

Spoken sotto voce (facing audience):

Whispered: Breathy

The ap-pa-ri-tion of these fa-ces — in the crowd:

7

Ped.

2

♩ = 60

Entering; slowly approaching baritone.

10

Pet - als on a wet, black bough.

*
|||
#

15

Singers clasp hands.

15

April

♩ = 66

p

Soprano

Baritone

Piano

Three spir - its

Three spir - its came to me,

p

Detailed description: This system contains the first three measures of the piece. The Soprano part has rests in the first two measures and then a half note G4. The Baritone part has rests in the first two measures and then a half note G3. The Piano part features a complex accompaniment with triplets and slurs. The lyrics 'Three spir - its' are under the Soprano line, and 'Three spir - its came to me,' are under the Baritone line.

4

came to me,

Three spir - its came to

Detailed description: This system contains measures 4 through 6. The Soprano part continues with a half note G4, then a half note F#4, and a whole rest. The Baritone part has a whole rest in measure 4, then a half note G3, a half note F#3, and a whole rest. The Piano part continues with a flowing accompaniment. The lyrics 'came to me,' are under the Soprano line, and 'Three spir - its came to' are under the Baritone line.

2
7

Three spir - its came to me. _____

Step a few paces away from the soprano.

me,

10

and drew me _____ a - part, _____ a -

and drew me _____ a - part, _____ a - part

10

8^{va}

14

part _____ to where the o - live - boughs _____

A few paces further away.

14

8^{va}

to where the o - live boughs

♩ = 56 *mp* *p*

21 (ah - - - - -)
(mm - - - - -)

24 ♩ = 66

the o - live boughs

the o - live boughs

4
26

lay _____ stripped _____ u-pon the

26

29

A few paces further away.

ground _____

lay stripped _____ u-pon the ground - - - -

29

33

A few paces further away.

pale _____ be-

car - nage, _____

33

37

neath _____ mist, _____

bright _____ mist, _____

42

pale car - nage _____ be - neath bright mist, _____

A few paces further away.

46

A few paces further away.

pale car - nage _____ be - neath bright mist, _____

6
49

be - neath
be - neath

Detailed description: This block contains the vocal staves for measures 49 to 51. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The lyrics 'be - neath' are written under the notes. The music consists of a few notes in each measure, with some rests.

Detailed description: This block contains the piano accompaniment for measures 49 to 51. It features a complex melodic line in the right hand with many accidentals and a more rhythmic bass line in the left hand. There are triplets and slurs throughout.

52

rit. ♩ = 56
bright mist.
bright mist.

Detailed description: This block contains the vocal staves for measures 52 to 55. The tempo is marked 'rit.' and the tempo signature is '♩ = 56'. The lyrics are 'bright mist.' and 'bright mist.'. The music is in a lower register with long notes and slurs.

rit.

Detailed description: This block contains the piano accompaniment for measures 52 to 55. The right hand has sustained chords and the left hand has a rhythmic accompaniment. The tempo is marked 'rit.'.

56

Detailed description: This block contains the vocal staves for measures 56 and 57. The notes are mostly whole notes and rests. The music ends with a double bar line.

8va - 1

Detailed description: This block contains the piano accompaniment for measures 56 and 57. It features a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The music ends with a double bar line. The instruction '8va - 1' is written at the bottom right.

These Fought, In Any Case . . .

♩ = 120

Before beginning, return to the distance, stage rear.

Before beginning, return to center. *mp*

NB: Observe ties strictly

These fought, in a-ny case, and some be-liev

mp

This system contains the first four measures of the score. It features a vocal line in bass clef and a piano accompaniment in grand staff. The vocal line begins with a rest for four measures, then enters in measure 2 with the lyrics 'These fought, in a-ny case, and some be-liev'. The piano accompaniment starts in measure 1 with a rest, then enters in measure 2. Dynamics include *mp* for both parts.

5

5 *mf* *f*

— ing, — pro-do-mo, in a-ny case, in a-ny case. Some quick to arm,

5 *mf* *f*

This system contains measures 5 through 8. The vocal line continues with the lyrics '— ing, — pro-do-mo, in a-ny case, in a-ny case. Some quick to arm,'. The piano accompaniment continues with a rest in measure 5, then enters in measure 6. Dynamics include *mf* and *f*.

mf *f*

Some for ad-ven-ture, Some for fear of weak-ness. Some for fear of cen-sure.

ff

Some quick to arm, Some for ad-ven-ture, Some for fear of weak-ness. Some for fear of

rit. ♩ = 84 *p* (From the distance)

Some for love of

rit. *p*

cen - sure.

22

slaugh - ter, in i - ma - gi - na - tion, learn - ing la - ter, learn - ing la -

22

22

28

accel. $\text{♩} = 120$

- ter. —

28

accel. *f*

Some in fear learn-ing love of slaugh-ter;

28

accel. *f*

33

p

died — some pro pa - tri - a, non dul - - - ce non et de - cor, not et de -

33

p

37

37 *ff*
 - cor. Walked _____ eye deep in hell, _____ be - liev - ing _____ in old men's lies,

41

41 *p*
 _____ then un - be - liev - ing, un - be liev - ing,

45

rit. $\text{♩} = 84$ *p* (From the distance)
 45 *f* *ff* *rit.* Came _____
 eye deep _____ in hell, *rit.*

51 *f p*

home, home to a lie, home to ma-ny de - ceits,

51

51 *f p*

57 *p* *accel.* ♩ = 120

57 *accel.* *f*

home to old lies and new in -

57 *p* *accel.* *f*

62

fa - mies, u - su - ry age old and

65

age thick, and li - ars in pub - lic plac - es.

68

Rejoin the baritone at stage center.

Dar - ing as ne - ver - be fore, Waste - age as ne - ver - be - fore,

72 *rit.* *p*

72 *rit.* Young _____

This system shows the beginning of the piece at measure 72. The vocal line is in treble clef with a 3/4 time signature. The piano accompaniment is in bass clef. The tempo is marked 'rit.' (ritardando) and the dynamic is 'p' (piano). The vocal line starts with a whole note 'Young' followed by a line. The piano accompaniment features a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes.

72 *rit.* *p*

The piano accompaniment for the first system, measures 72-75. It consists of two staves (treble and bass clef). The music is in 3/4 time and features a mix of chords and moving lines. The dynamic is marked 'p' (piano). There is a hairpin crescendo leading into measure 75.

76 *f* *p*

blood _____ and high _____ blood, _____ Fair _____

76 *mp* *f* *p*

and high _____ blood, _____ Fair _____

This system covers measures 76-79. The vocal line has lyrics: 'blood and high blood, Fair'. The piano accompaniment has lyrics: 'and high blood, Fair'. Dynamics include 'f' (forte), 'p' (piano), and 'mp' (mezzo-piano). The music continues with similar rhythmic patterns and harmonic support.

76 *f* *p*

The piano accompaniment for the second system, measures 76-79. It continues the harmonic and rhythmic patterns from the first system. Dynamics are marked 'f' and 'p'. The piano part provides a steady accompaniment for the vocal line.

80 *p*

cheeks _____ and fine bod - ies, _____

80 *p*

cheeks _____ and fine bod - ies, _____

This system covers measures 80-83. The vocal line has lyrics: 'cheeks and fine bod - ies,'. The piano accompaniment has lyrics: 'cheeks and fine bod - ies,'. The dynamic is marked 'p' (piano). The music concludes this section with a final cadence.

80 *p* *pp*

The piano accompaniment for the third system, measures 80-83. It concludes the piece with a final cadence. Dynamics are marked 'p' and 'pp' (pianissimo). The piano part features a final melodic flourish in the right hand.

8 $\text{♩} = 120$ $\text{♩} = 84$ *f*

ah

84 *ff* *rit.*

For - ti - tude as ne - ver be - fore, Frank - ness as ne - ver be fore,

84 *ff* *rit.*

88 $\text{♩} = 120$

88 *p*

dis - il - lu - sions

88 *p* *ff*

ped.

92

92 *Sprechstimme*

as ne-ver told in the old days, hys-ter - - - i-as,

92 *mf*

Do not release pedal.

97

trench - con - fess - ions, ____ laugh - ter out of dead bel - lies. ____

p

*

Detailed description: This is a musical score for three staves. The top staff is a vocal line in treble clef, starting with a whole rest and ending with a whole note. The middle staff contains the lyrics: "trench - con - fess - ions, ____ laugh - ter out of dead bel - lies. ____". The bottom staff is a piano accompaniment in grand staff (treble and bass clefs). It begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic and features a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. A fermata is placed over the final chord in both hands. A small asterisk (*) is located at the bottom right of the piano part.

Erat Hora

$\text{♩} = 80$

Before beginning, step back, stand behind baritone.

p

"Thank you, — what - e - ver comes,

Before beginning, step forward.

p

ped. * ped. *

⁴

Intoned very softly:

what - e - ver comes, — what - e - ver comes."

⁴ Spoken very softly: *p*

what - e - ver comes, "Thank you, — what - e - ver comes."

⁴

2
9

And then she turned, _____ and as the

12

The ray _____ of sun...
ray of sun on hang - ing flow - ers fades

16

ah! _____
when the wind hath lift - ed them a - side, _____ went swift-ly from me, _____ from me, _____ from

20 *ppp*

[thee - - -]

20 *f*

me. _____ Nay, what e - ver comes, _____ one _ hour

26

26 *p*

_____ was sun - lit, _____ and the most high gods may not make boast of a - ny

26 *p*

30

_____ than to have watched _____ that

30

bet-ter thing than to have watched that hour

30

4
34 *f* *pp*

hour as it passed,

34 *f* *p*

as it passed,

34 *f* *p*

38 *pp*

than to have watched that hour as it passed.

38 *pp*

than to have watched that hour as it passed.

38 *mf* *p*

43

Musical score for measures 43-47. The system consists of a grand staff with a treble clef on the upper staff and a bass clef on the lower staff. Measure 43 features a treble staff with a half note chord (F4, A4) and a bass staff with a half note chord (C3, E2). Measure 44 has a treble staff with a half note chord (F4, A4) and a bass staff with a half note chord (C3, E2). Measure 45 has a treble staff with a half note chord (F4, A4) and a bass staff with a half note chord (C3, E2). Measure 46 has a treble staff with a half note chord (F4, A4) and a bass staff with a half note chord (C3, E2). Measure 47 has a treble staff with a half note chord (F4, A4) and a bass staff with a half note chord (C3, E2). There are two bar lines below the bass staff in measures 43 and 44, indicating fingerings for the left hand.

48

Musical score for measures 48-51. The system consists of a grand staff with a treble clef on the upper staff and a bass clef on the lower staff. Measure 48 has a treble staff with a half note chord (F4, A4) and a bass staff with a half note chord (C3, E2). Measure 49 has a treble staff with a half note chord (F4, A4) and a bass staff with a half note chord (C3, E2). Measure 50 has a treble staff with a half note chord (F4, A4) and a bass staff with a half note chord (C3, E2). Measure 51 has a treble staff with a half note chord (F4, A4) and a bass staff with a half note chord (C3, E2). There are three bar lines below the bass staff in measures 48, 49, and 50, indicating fingerings for the left hand.

52

Musical score for measures 52-55. The system consists of a grand staff with a treble clef on the upper staff and a bass clef on the lower staff. Measure 52 has a treble staff with a half note chord (F4, A4) and a bass staff with a half note chord (C3, E2). Measure 53 has a treble staff with a half note chord (F4, A4) and a bass staff with a half note chord (C3, E2). Measure 54 has a treble staff with a half note chord (F4, A4) and a bass staff with a half note chord (C3, E2). Measure 55 has a treble staff with a half note chord (F4, A4) and a bass staff with a half note chord (C3, E2). There are three bar lines below the bass staff in measures 52, 53, and 54, indicating fingerings for the left hand. A *tr* (trill) marking is present above the treble staff in measure 55.

56

Musical score for measures 56-60. The system consists of a grand staff with a treble clef on the upper staff and a bass clef on the lower staff. Measure 56 has a treble staff with a half note chord (F4, A4) and a bass staff with a half note chord (C3, E2). Measure 57 has a treble staff with a half note chord (F4, A4) and a bass staff with a half note chord (C3, E2). Measure 58 has a treble staff with a half note chord (F4, A4) and a bass staff with a half note chord (C3, E2). Measure 59 has a treble staff with a half note chord (F4, A4) and a bass staff with a half note chord (C3, E2). Measure 60 has a treble staff with a half note chord (F4, A4) and a bass staff with a half note chord (C3, E2). There are three bar lines below the bass staff in measures 56, 57, and 58, indicating fingerings for the left hand. A *tr* (trill) marking is present above the treble staff in measure 60.

61

Musical score for measures 61-64. The system consists of a grand staff with a treble clef on the upper staff and a bass clef on the lower staff. Measure 61 has a treble staff with a half note chord (F4, A4) and a bass staff with a half note chord (C3, E2). Measure 62 has a treble staff with a half note chord (F4, A4) and a bass staff with a half note chord (C3, E2). Measure 63 has a treble staff with a half note chord (F4, A4) and a bass staff with a half note chord (C3, E2). Measure 64 has a treble staff with a half note chord (F4, A4) and a bass staff with a half note chord (C3, E2). There are three bar lines below the bass staff in measures 61, 62, and 63, indicating fingerings for the left hand. A *tr* (trill) marking is present above the treble staff in measure 61.

65

f

This system contains measures 65 through 70. The music is in a key with two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The right hand features complex chordal textures with many accidentals, while the left hand plays a more rhythmic accompaniment. A dynamic marking of *f* (forte) is present in the second measure.

71

3 6

This system contains measures 71 through 74. The right hand has a melodic line with a triplet of eighth notes in measure 73 and a sextuplet of eighth notes in measure 74. The left hand provides a steady accompaniment with some triplet markings. Dynamic markings *p* (piano) are used in measures 72 and 73.

75

f

3 3

This system contains measures 75 through 79. The right hand features a dense texture of chords, with triplet markings in measures 77 and 78. The left hand continues with a rhythmic accompaniment. A dynamic marking of *f* (forte) is present in measure 77.

80

p *mf* *p* *mf* *p*

This system contains measures 80 through 84. The right hand has a melodic line with various dynamics: *p* (piano) in measure 80, *mf* (mezzo-forte) in measure 81, *p* in measure 82, *mf* in measure 83, and *p* in measure 84. The left hand plays a continuous eighth-note accompaniment.

85

p

"Thank you, — what - e - ver comes, what-

90

p

"Thank you, — what - e - ver comes." —
e - ver comes."

94

And then she turned, — and as the

...the ray of sun on hang - ing flow - ers

ray of sun on hang - ing flow - ers

mf

fades

when the wind hath lift-ed them a - side, — went swift-ly from me, —

f *mf* *f* *p*

f *mf* *f sempre*

f

104 Slowly come from behind baritone until standing side by side: *f*

from me, — from me. — Nay, —

p *f*

from me, — from me. — Nay,

p *f*

109

— what e - ver comes, — one hour — was sun - lit, —

109

109

114

— and the most high gods may not make boast of a-ny bet-ter thing than to have

114

114

ff

mp

mp

than to have

ff

mp

118

watched that hour as it passed, —

118

118

p

Step back, return to position behind baritone.

p

watched that hour as it passed, —

p

123 **Adagio**

123

123

123

than to have watched that hour as it

Detailed description: This system contains measures 123, 124, and 125. The top staff is a vocal line in treble clef with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a common time signature. It features a long, sustained note in measure 123, followed by a rest in measure 124, and a melodic phrase in measure 125. The middle staff is a bass line in bass clef, mirroring the vocal line with rests and a melodic phrase. The bottom staff is a piano accompaniment in grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The right hand plays chords, and the left hand plays a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The tempo is marked 'Adagio'.

126 **Tempo I**

126

126

126

passed.

mf *p* *pp*

8vb

Detailed description: This system contains measures 126, 127, 128, 129, and 130. The top staff is a vocal line in treble clef, mostly containing rests. The middle staff is a bass line in bass clef, starting with a melodic phrase in measure 126 and then containing rests. The bottom staff is a piano accompaniment in grand staff. The right hand plays chords with dynamic markings *mf*, *p*, and *pp*. The left hand plays chords, with an *8vb* marking in measure 130. The tempo is marked 'Tempo I'.

Doria

♩ = 40

Before beginning, move back to center stage.

Before beginning, move to piano.
Stand by lid, behind the soprano.

Sing into piano harp (lean in).

mp

Be _____ in me _____

p

8^{vb} >

♯

Detailed description: This system contains the first two measures of the piece. It features a vocal line in the upper staff, a piano accompaniment in the lower two staves, and a bass line in the bottom-most staff. The vocal line begins with a rest, followed by the lyrics 'Be _____ in me _____' starting in the second measure. The piano accompaniment starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The bass line includes a '8^{vb}' marking and a sharp sign.

3

as the e - ter - nal moods of the bleak wind,

3

3

8^{va}

♯

8^{vb} >

Detailed description: This system contains the next four measures. The vocal line continues with the lyrics 'as the e - ter - nal moods of the bleak wind,'. The piano accompaniment features triplets in the first two measures. The bass line includes a '3' marking and an '8^{va}' marking. The system concludes with a sharp sign and an '8^{vb}' marking.

pp

Be in me.

Turn to audience; stay at piano.

p

and not, not as

loco

va

9

tran - si - ent things are, — gai - e - ty of flow - ers. — Have me — in the

9

va

8vb - 1

12

Be in me.

strong lone - li-ness of sun - less cliffs, — and of gray —

12

17

Be in me _____
 Approach soprano a few paces, still behind her.

wa - ters. _____

17

20

Let the gods _____ speak soft - - - - - ly of

20

pp

8va

22

pp *ppp*

in days here af - ter: _____

Move to piano, as before.

us _____ in days here - af - ter, _____

22

8va *loco*

25

The sha-dow-y flow-ers _____ of Or-cus _____ re-mem - - - - - ber

25

28

re-mem - - - - - ber thee. _____

♦ = With palm, strike middle-register strings of piano harp. Sound should be soft but resonant.

thee, _____ re-mem _____ ber thee, _____ re-mem - - - - - ber.

28

The Coming of War

♩ = 88

Before beginning, go to piano behind baritone, reversing positions at the start of "Doria." Profile to audience.
Tacet until m. 30

Before beginning, return to stage center. *f*
Move in synch with soprano.

An

f

3

3

3

3

4

4

4

i - image of Le the, _____ of Le - the _____ and the fields _____ full _____

3

3

3

3

2
7

of faint light, but gold - en,

This system contains measures 2 through 7. It features a vocal line in the bass clef and a piano accompaniment in grand staff. The piano part includes triplet markings in measures 5 and 6. The lyrics are: "of faint light, but gold - en,"

11

gray cliffs, and be-neath them a sea

This system contains measures 11 through 14. It features a vocal line in the bass clef and a piano accompaniment in grand staff. The piano part includes triplet markings in measures 12 and 13. The lyrics are: "gray cliffs, and be-neath them a sea"

15

harsh - er than gra - nite,

ff

This system contains measures 15 through 18. It features a vocal line in the bass clef and a piano accompaniment in grand staff. The piano part includes triplet markings in measure 16 and a fortissimo (*ff*) dynamic marking in measure 17. The lyrics are: "harsh - er than gra - nite,"

19

un - still ne-ver ceas - ing ne-ver ceas - ing

23

high forms with the move-ment of

27

Draw level with baritone, but a bit apart. *f*

This, gods, per-i-lous as-pect, and one said,

31 *ff*
this is Ac - tae - - - - - on." _____

31

31 *ff*
3 3 3

35 Move next to baritone. $\text{♩} = 66$
p
Ac - tae - on _____ of the gold - en greaves. _____

35 *p*
Ac - tae - on _____ of the gold - en greaves. _____

35
3

38 *pp*

Ah

38

O-ver fair mea-dows, — o-ver the cool face

38 *p*

43

43

— of that field, — un-still, un - still — e-ver mov-ing, — un -

43 *8va- loco*

47

Ah

47

still, — e-ver mov-ing, e-ver mov-ing, Hosts of an an-cient

47

52 Begin to withdraw.

Ah _____ Ah _____ Ah _____

peo-ple, _____ un-still, _____ e-ver mov-ing, _____ un-still, _____ e-ver mov-ing, the

Simile

57 No longer visible.

—

Turning around Back to audience

si - - - - lent cor - - - - tege. _____

8^{va}