At a Crossroads near Delphi

Paul Kane[1]

> For in real tragedy, it is not the hero who perishes: it is the Chorus.
> —Joseph Brodsky

We live without heroes now—just as well,
some say—yet in that absence it is we
who perish. Not all at once, of course,
but singly, or in pairs, unnoted by the many,
with only a few friends and family to mourn us.
It is the nature of things—we are told—
neither judgment nor law but out of the indifference
of gods who have their own drama to play out.
O roads that lead away,
Which way are we to turn?

Yes, we have seen it before, and raised our voices
in despair, with some ready to throw themselves
upon the advancing machinery. (It runs
on blood—it leaves a slick behind.)
To act has done our hearts good, but it
drives us mad to think what might have been,
or what will be. Exposed upon this stage,
we fear most the forgetfulness of others—

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that it will all have been in vain, knowing
it was all in vain to begin with.
O roads that lead away,
When will it be our turn?

Time was, our numbers gave us strength, but now,
dwindled, a mere glint in the eye will start the dogs.
We were always ineffectual, you say, but we
knew the truth in the end, as the bodies were carted off.
We are moving on, to a different stage, where speech,
like a form of silence or a breath, is emptied out
and carried with the wind along these dusty roads.
Look!—down the way—torches advancing.
O road that leads our way,
Which way are we to turn?