

Man-Gods and Martyrs



Der Sabbathabend in der Stadt, Jacob Steinhardt, 1920

The seething blackness of Aiud, Baia,
Suceava, Sighet, and Pitesti
Was not simply the absence of light
But an antilight whose substance was the malice
Of demons and the hatred and violence
Of men. When Communism fell, it fled

And hid away in the lairs and crevices
Deep within the barren rocks.

Thirty years
Have passed, and man is once again a wolf
To man. Fear of death and suffering
From an unknown germ calls forth the hideous
Darkness from its hidden pits, obeying
Like a golem conjured by a grimoire's spell,
Gathering, clabbering, twisting, coiling,
Round men and women—who would save their flesh
By injection of murdered children made—
Who would gain freedom by refusing it
To those whose consciences are uneasy—
Who would prolong their lives by denying
A livelihood to hesitant neighbors.

Lies and deceit pollute the thoughts in our heads;
Anger and unkindness are our daily bread.
Is this the apex of cosmic evolution—
Cain killing Abel over and over again?
Is this how the man-god will appear—
By tormenting every unmasked speaker?
Or will mercy visit us again
Through the rising of another generation
Of holy martyrs and confessors—
Patterned after Paisie, Arsenie, George,
Shepherds of Romania—God-bright guides
Of the faithful remnant to Truth and Light,
Mankind regenerated in a hillside hut
By an elder's beaming smile and gentle tut?