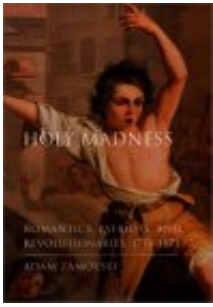

Holy Madness: Romantics, Patriots, and Revolutionaries 1776 - 1871 by Adam Zamoyski (2000), 498 pages.



Here is another book of a gifted writer (and it was our pleasure to review two of them in 1996), but the first one dealing with international history. Its essence was defined by one expert as a "gaggle of students, poets, romantics, glory seekers, intellectuals, officers, and internationalists" who were active during this period throughout Europe. There were conspiracies, rebellions, secret societies, uprisings. This extensively researched treatise brought the London Times' admiration for Zamoyski's effort to present illustrations of passion, myth-making bombast, absurdities, bellicosities, and a convoluted confusion of aims evident in the biographies of the book's many heroes. The title comes from Lafayette who wrote in 1793 while imprisoned that he considered himself a victim of a "holy madness." The book is not a conventional history, and far from a routine academic lecture. Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), a true sage of the Age of Enlightenment, with books such as *Confessions* and *Social Contract* led directly to the Romantic Age. It also gave rise to the "cult of the nation," a quasi-religious idealism with a deep reverence for the lasting value of tradition for each human group but always in accordance with universal self-renewal. This movement had nothing to do with the chauvinistic nationalism of the 20th century and was not connected to religion. The author covers the history of romanticism as viewed through political eyes. Some aspects were glorious and uplifting, others depressing. No wonder, for the heroes tried to liberate our wicked world from misery while constantly at odds with cold realities. The stage was full of innocent victims.

Zamoyski begins with Benjamin Franklin's momentous visit to Paris in 1776, which caused an avalanche of "Continentalists" to come to America's shores. The enthusiasm, which reigned in Europe watching the new country's birth is astonishing. Perhaps France's defeat in her seven-year war with Britain (1756 - 1763), when all Canadian and Indian possessions were lost, played a role. Soon Lafayette landed near Charleston, embracing the new America. Of course no one had any inkling of the impending French Revolution. Reading about the Napoleonic period causes dismay: here was Gen. Dąbrowski with his 5,000 men in northern Italy, ready to march via Hungary to Poland ("Przejdziem Wisłę, przejdziem Wartę...") when the political deals of Bonaparte halted these dreams. Instead, most of these men were shipped to Haiti to fight a French colonial war. Fortunately, the natives considered the Poles as being "black friendly" and spared them. Napoleon treated Polish contingents as "cannon fodder" and this was true whether fighting the Spaniards in Somo Sierra or on the banks of Berezina.

The Holy Alliance of 1815 was the ultimate setback for the Romantics. They came from many nations (with the possible exception of the cool, reasonable, and smug British), and the book offers fascinating profiles, primarily of the Westerners, but dozens of Poles seem to have been everywhere. In my view, three individuals stand above the others: Giuseppe Garibaldi, Lajos Kossuth of Hungary, and General Józef Bem. The chapters describing their lives are very inspiring.

Not really surprisingly, there were temporary triumphs as well as defeats, some of them trivial and often caused by the absence of planning, a lack of organization, and even by a disregard of common sense. In 1826 the Russian Decembrists had a strong case against the new Tsar and made appeals to the troops about the *Konstitutsya*. Unfortunately, the illiterate soldiers thought they were talking about the lovely wife of the Grand Duke. In 1829 Wincenty Smagłowski planned to hide behind the throne at the Warsaw Castle while the Tsar came for his coronation; he wanted to leap out and hold Nicolas under personal arrest until it was agreed that the Polish crown be given to Napoleon's son residing in Vienna. In early 1830, the conspirators were running around Warsaw asking horrified Niemcewicz and then Lelewel to take charge of the impending uprising that really made no sense at that time. Even without a leader, they decided to strike by catching Grand Duke Konstanty at a small Belweder Palace. Alas, they could not find him as he hid in his servant's bedroom.

Anecdotes aside, the spirit of the uprising found admirers just about everywhere, and they included Richard Wagner who composed the *Polonia* overture, and Casimir Delavigne, whose march *La Varsoivienne* is equal to *La Marseillaise* in its rousing music. All this happened while 38,000 persons were shipped to Siberia, and the Polish "Great Emigration" began. On other fronts, the turn of events was far from satisfactory. The "Spring of Nations" (1846 - 48) was a disaster: Hungarians lost their gamble; the papacy was on the side of the reactionaries. The unification of Italy moved slowly and was actually caused by outside events. True, the new countries of Belgium and Greece came into existence. The end of the Romantic era came with the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, and at this juncture entirely new concepts of nationalism were born. The last chapter of the book offers us an excellent analysis of this new situation. -- While the political struggles were taking place, much of Europe was engulfed in an industrial revolution that was rapidly changing the continent. Moreover, there were dramatic social changes brought about by the abolition of serfdom in certain countries, even as a new serfdom was creeping into factories.

