

# **KONDRATY RYLEYEV**

**Johanna Granville**

**Copyright: Johanna Granville, "Kondraty Ryleyev." In *The Encyclopedia of Russian History*, edited by James R. Millar. New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2004 (pp. 1339-1340).**

**Ryleyev, Kondraty Fedorovitch (1795-1826), a poet, played a leading role in organizing the mutiny of the military units in St. Petersburg that occurred on December 14, 1825 (the so-called Decembrist uprising). He was one of the five rebels who were executed, along with Pestel, Kakhovskoi, Muraviev-Apostol, and Bestuzhev-Riumin. One hundred and fifty other conspirators were deported.**

**Born into the family of an army officer, Ryleyev also became an officer and served in units stationed in West Europe after the defeat of Napoleon's armies. The general backwardness of Russian society sharply contrasted with the capitalist countries of Western Europe. Upon returning to St. Petersburg, Ryleyev became active in a variety of social and political circles. In 1823 he joined the secret Northern Society. Situated in St. Petersburg, it consisted of moderate reformists who leaned toward establishment of a constitutional monarchy, modeled after the English version. Nikita Muraviev and Sergei Trubetskoi headed the society. By contrast, the Southern Society was created by Pavel Pestel in Tulchin. It gathered together more radical members of the movement who demanded complete eradication of the extant tsarist autocracy and the establishment of a democratic republic based upon on universal suffrage.**

With the exception of his earliest works Ryleyev's poems are romantic in style. Their themes reflect patriotic sentiments and concern with the course of Russian history. His verses ushered in ideas about the duty to sacrifice one's artistic calling for service to the downtrodden masses well before Nekrasov preached them in his own poetry. Tragically, Ryleyev was not able fully to develop his poetic talents, and his celebrity is mainly due to the martyrdom he underwent in the cause of freedom. His sarcastic wit has also become legend. Apparently, just as Ryleyev was about to be hanged, the rope broke and he fell to the ground. Bruised and battered, he got up, and said, "In Russia they do not know how to do anything properly, not even how to make a rope." An accident of this sort usually resulted in a pardon, so a messenger was sent to Tsar Nicholas to know his pleasure. The tsar asked, "What did he say?" "Sire, he said that in Russia they do not even know how to make a rope properly." "Well, let the contrary be proved," said Nicholas.

## **Bibliography**

Eidel'man, N. Ia. *Udivitel'noe Pokolenie: Dekabristy: Litsa i Sud'by* Sankt-Peterburg: Izdatel'stvo "Pushkinskii fond," 2001).

Murav'ev, Nikita and E. A. Pavliuchenko (comp.). *Pis'ma Dekabrista, 1813-1826 gg.* (Moskva: "Pamiatniki istoricheskoi mysli", 2001).

Nevelev, G. A. Pushkin. "*Ob 14-m Dekabria*": *Rekonstruktsiia Dekabristskogo Dokumental'nogo Teksta* (Sankt-Peterburg: Tekhnologos, 1998).

Obolonskii, A. V. and Vincent Ostrom. *The Drama of Russian Political History: System Against Individuality* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2003).