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| **Mykola Hurovych Kulish (КУЛІШ МИКОЛА ГУРОВИЧ) (1892-1937)** |
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| Mykola Hurovych Kulish was born 5 December, Old Style (18 December New Style) 1892 in Chaplinka, Tavricheskaia gubernia, in the Russian Empire (today Ukraine’s Kherson oblast’) to a peasant family. After his mother's death he left home to attend school in nearby Oleshky, where he met his future wife, Antonina, and his lifelong friend, Ivan Shevchenko (literary pseudonym, Dniprovskii). He started university in Odessa in 1914, but was soon conscripted into the Russian Imperial Army and fought on the Smolensk front. After the February Revolution he served in the frontline soldiers’ committees, and he continued to fight with the Red Army during the Civil War. He joined the Communist Party in 1919. In 1922 Kulish was decommissioned to the post of school inspector in the People’s Commissariat of Enlightenment (Narkomos) in Odessa, where he began to write seriously. He joined the Odessa branch of the organization *Hart* (*Tempering*), headed the Zinovievsk (Russian imperial Ekaterinoslav, today's Kirovohrad) branch of the Party's literary journal *Chervonyi shliakh* (*Red Path*), and in 1925 the Soviet Ukrainian party-state promoted Kulish to Kharkiv, then the capital of Soviet Ukraine.  [Image: Kulish.png]  In Kharkiv Kulish became a leading cultural figure. He joined the circle around writer Mykola Khvylovyi and the literary organization *Vaplite*, even serving as its president from 1927-1928. He was one of the editors of the literary journal *Literaturnyi iarmarok* (*Literary Fair*) and one of the leaders of the literary organization *Prolitfront*. More importantly, he became the leading early Soviet Ukrainian playwright. His plays *97* (1924)and *Komuna v stepakh* (*Commune in the Steppes*, 1925) were produced in Soviet Ukraine and throughout the Soviet Union. He became the leading playwright for Les Kurbas’ Berezil' theatre company, although only his 1929 comedy on Ukrainianization, *Myna Mazailo*, had frequent and extended performances. The Commissariat of Enlightenment shut down 1927’s *Narodnyi Malakhii* (*The People's Malakhii*) and did not permit *Patetychna sonata* (*Sonata Pathétique*) to be performed. Kulish's final play, *Maklena Grasa* (1933), provoked the closing of the Berezil' itself and the removal of Les' Kurbas from the position of artistic director.  Kulish was removed from the Party in June 1934 and arrested on 5 December 1934. He was sentenced to ten years, sent to the Gulag camps on the Solovetsky islands, and executed on 3 November 1937 in Sandormorkh, Karelia, in the Soviet north. His family survived Nazi occupation and his son, Volodymyr, emigrated to the United States with many of Kulish’s texts.  Kulish’s theatrical legacy lies in the plays produced at the Berezil. His early plays explore the world of the common village encounter with socialism (*97*, *Komuna v stepakh*). His later plays detail the myriad experiences of socialism in the Ukrainian context: *Narodnyi Malakhii* (1927) tells of a postman’s ‘blue dreams’ of socialism; *Myna Mazailo* (1929) is a satiric take on Ukrainianization that spares no one; *Maklena Grasa* (1933), in the year of the Holodomor, offers a dark tragicomic exploration of a reaction to famine; and *Patetychna* *sonata* (1930) explores the multiple stories of the revolution in Kyiv. Although a loyal Communist, Kulish did not refrain from articulating his doubts and disillusionment with the system in his work. |
| Further reading:  Kuziakina, Natalia. *Dramaturh Mykoly Kulisha. Literaturno-krytychni narys*. Kyiv: Radians’kyi pysmennyk, 1962.  Kuziakina, Natalia. *Traiektorii dol'*. Kyiv: Tempora, 2010.  Pratsovyiti, Volodymyr. *Ukrainskyi natsionalnyi kharakter u dramaturhii Mykoly Kulish.*  L’viv: Svit, 1998.  Marko Stech, "Kulish and the Devil," *Journal of Ukrainian Studies* 32/1 (Spring 2007), 1-35.  M. P. Kodak, *Dramatyka Mykoly Kulisha: Patetychna sonata*. Lutsk: Tverdynia, 2011. |