**Kulish, Mykola Hurovych (КУЛІШ МИКОЛА ГУРОВИЧ) (1892-1937)**

Leading early Soviet Ukrainian playwright and cultural figure. Born to a peasant family in 1892, Kulish attended school and rose through the ranks of the Russian Imperial and Soviet Red Army. Joining the party in 1919 he was a loyal member until he was removed in 1934, but he expressed his doubts and disillusions in his theatrical works. He began writing seriously while working as a school inspector in Odessa region after the Civil War. His plays *97* and *Komuna v stepakh*, both realistic works about the village encounter with socialism, were performed throughout the Soviet Union and secured Kulish's promotion to Kharkiv, the capital of Soviet Ukraine. There he became a member of the leading cultural elite and began his fruitful collaboration with Les KURBAS' BEREZIL Theatre Company. This work included *Myna Mazailo*, a satiric take on Ukrainianization; *Narodnyi Malakhii*, about a postman disillusioned with socialism; *Maklena Grasa*, a play about famine, albeit set in Poland, performed during Soviet Ukraine's Holodomor. After *Maklena* Kulish fell out of favor, was expelled from the Party, arrested in late 1934 and sentenced to 10 years in the Gulag at the Solovetsky islands. He was executed on 3 November 1937 in Sandormorkh, in the Soviet north.



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 and 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.

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* and *Komuna v stepakh* (Commune in the Steppes) 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*, ran for 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*, 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 village encounter with socialism (*97*, *Komuna v stepakh*). His later plays detail the myriad experiences of socialism in the Ukrainian context: *Narodnyi Malakhii* tells of a postman’s “blue dreams” of socialism; *Myna Mazailo* is a satiric take on Ukrainianization that spares no one; *Maklena Grasa*, in the year of the Holodomor, offers a dark tragicomic exploration of a reaction to famine; *Patetychna* *sonata* explores the multiple stories of the revolution in Kyiv. Although a loyal Communist, Kulish did not refrain from articulating his doubts and disillusion in his work.

**List of Major Published/Performed Works**

*Otak zahynuv Huska* (And so died Huska, 1926)

*97* (1924)

*Komuna v stepakh* (Commune in the Steppes, 1925)

*Khulii khuryna* (1926)

*Narodnyi Malakhiii* (The People's Malakhii, 1927)

*Myna Mazailo* (1929)

*Patetychna sonata* (Sonata Pathetique, 1930); *Pateticheskaia sonata* (Russian, 1930); *Die Beethovensonate* (Berlin, 1932); *Patetychna sonata* (Krakow, 1943); in English, trans. and ed. George S. N. Luckyj and Moira Luckyj (Littleton, Colorado: Ukrainian Academic Press, 1975).

*Maklena Grasa* (1933)

*Zona* (Blight, 1926, revised as *Zakut,* Dead End, 1929). Trans. and ed. Maria Popovich-Semeniuk and John Woodsworth (Ottawa: Legas, 1996).

Kulish, *Tvory v dvokh tomakh*, ed. Les Taniuk. Kyiv: Radians'kyi pysmennyk, 1990. The most comprehensive collection of Kulish's works.

**References and Further Reading**

Kuziakina, Natalia. *Dramaturh Mykoly Kulisha. Literaturno-krytychni narys*. Kyiv: Radians’kyi pysmennyk, 1962. Kuziakina was the leading theatre scholar on Kulish and his works.

Kuziakina, Natalia. *Traiektorii dol'*. Kyiv: Tempora, 2010. Kuziakina wrote this monograph on Kulish's life in Moscow in the 1980s, but it was only published in 2010.

Pratsovyiti, Volodymyr. *Ukrainskyi natsionalnyi kharakter u dramaturhii Mykoly Kulish.*  L’viv: Svit, 1998. By a Ukrainian literary scholar of Kulish.

Marko Stech, "Kulish and the Devil," *Journal of Ukrainian Studies* 32/1 (Spring 2007), 1-35. Stech wrote his doctoral dissertation on Kulish.

M. P. Kodak, *Dramatyka Mykoly Kulisha: Patetychna sonata*. Lutsk: Tverdynia, 2011. A focus on one of the most-translated of Kulish's plays, although one never produced in Soviet Ukraine itself.

url for photo:

<http://www.encyclopediaofukraine.com/display.asp?linkpath=pages%5CK%5CU%5CKulishMykola.htm>

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