



Alcestis: A Play

Euripides

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In the years before his death at age sixty-eight in 1998, Hughes translated several classical works with great energy and ingenuity. His *Tales from Ovid* was called "one of the great works of our century" (Michael Hofmann, *The Times*, London), his *Oresteia of Aeschylus* is considered the definitive version, and his *Phèdre* was acclaimed on stage in New York as well as London. Hughes's version of Euripides's *Alcestis*, the last of his translations, has the great brio of those works, and it is a powerful and moving conclusion to the great final phase of Hughes's career.

Euripides was, with Aeschylus and Sophocles, one of the greatest of Greek dramatists. *Alcestis* tells the story of a king's grief for his wife, Alcestis, who has given her young life so that he may live. As translated by Hughes, the story has a distinctly modern sensibility while retaining the spirit of antiquity. It is a profound meditation on human mortality.

Ted Hughes's last book of poems, *Birthday Letters*, won the Whitbread Book of the Year Prize. He was Poet Laureate to Queen Elizabeth II and lived in Devon, England until he died in 1998.

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