



# Wrinkled Deep in Time: Aging in Shakespeare

*Maurice Charney*

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## **Wrinkled Deep in Time: Aging in Shakespeare** Maurice Charney

Shakespeare was acutely aware of our intimate struggles with aging. His dramatic characters either prosper or suffer according to their relationship with maturity, and his sonnets eloquently explore time's ravaging effects. "Wrinkled deep in time" is how the queen describes herself in *Antony and Cleopatra*, and at the end of *King Lear*, there is a tragic sense that both the king and Gloucester have acquired a wisdom they otherwise lacked at the beginning of the play. Even Juliet matures considerably before she drinks Friar Lawrence's potion, and Macbeth and his wife prematurely grow old from their murderous schemes.

Drawing on historical documents and the dramatist's own complex depictions, Maurice Charney conducts an original investigation into patterns of aging in Shakespeare, exploring the fulfillment or distress of Shakespeare's characters in combination with their mental and physical decline. Comparing the characterizations of elderly kings and queens, older lovers, patriarchal men, matriarchal women, and the senex—the stereotypical old man of Roman comedy—with the history of life expectancy in Shakespeare's England, Charney uncovers similarities and differences between our contemporary attitudes toward aging and aging as it was understood more than four hundred years ago. From this dynamic examination, a new perspective on Shakespeare emerges, one that celebrates and deepens our knowledge of his subtler themes and characters.

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