George Peele was born about 1558, and was educated at the grammar school of Christ's Hospital, of which his father James Peele, a maker of pageants, was clerk, and at Oxford, where he proceeded B.A. in 1577 and M.A. in 1579. When he returned to Oxford on business in 1583, two years after his departure for London, he was called upon to manage the performance of two Latin plays by William Gager for the entertainment of Alasco, a Polish prince, and in two sets of Latin elegiacs Gager commended Peele as wit and poet. The rest of his life was apparently spent in literary work in London among such friends as Greene, Lodge, Nashe, and Watson. Like other convivial spirits among the literary men of the time, Peele seems to have been given to excesses. These probably hastened his end, and were no doubt responsible for the ascription to him of a series of escapades and sayings, chiefly fabulous in all likelihood, which furnished material for the *Jests of George Peele*, published about 1605. He was buried in the Parish of St. James, Clerkenwell, November 9, 1596.

Peele's extent work is predominantly dramatic. His first play, *The Arraignment of Paris*, was prepared for boys and acted before Elizabeth. It's poetic fancy, like the wit and conceit of Lyly's prose dialogue, made its appeal to courtly taste. Nashe in the preface to Greene's *Menaphon* (1589) declares that it reveals the "pregnant dexterity of wit and manifold variety of invention" of Peele, whom he calls the great maker of phrases ("*primum verborum artifex*"). Peele was soon writing for the companies of professional players, and had his share, with other University Wits, in transforming the crude popular drama of the London stage into literary drama. His great contribution lay in his poetic diction, but with his fellows he experimented in the various types of plays in vogue between 1585 and 1595. In addition to *The Arraignment of Paris* and *The Old Wives' Tale*, Peele wrote the crude chronicle play of *King Edward the First*, published in mutilated form in 1593 and 1599; *The Battle of Alcazar*, which, although it was published anonymously in 1594, is generally recognized as Peele's from internal evidence and from the fact that six lines from it were printed as his in *England's Parnassus* (1600); and *The Love of King David and Fair Bethsabe*, published in 1599, regarding the merit of whose ornate verse there is a wide range of opinion. He also wrote several plays now lost and verse for London pageants.

The masque-like pastoral, *The Arraignment of Paris*, often considered Peele's best play, was published anonymously, and apparently without entry in the Stationer's registry, by Henry Marsh in 1584. Its authorship is established by Nashe's allusion in the preface of *Menaphon* and by the attribution of two of its songs to Peele in *England's Parnassus*. From the Greek myth of Paris' award of the golden apple, used by Udall to flatter Anne Boleyn, Peele fashioned an elaborate compliment to her daughter Elizabeth. No specific source has been found for the play, but Peele followed pastoral traditions. He is indebted to Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar* for the names of the shepherds, and, as Miss Jeffrey has shown, to Paulilli's *Il Giuditio di Paride* for many conventional devices.

The Old Wives' Tale was entered in the Stationer's Register, April 16, 1595, and printed by John Danter the same year. The identification of the initials "G.P." on the title page as those of George Peele, which was made by Herbert in *Typographical Antiquities*, has never been challenged. The date of composition is usually thought to lie between 1590 and 1593, but recently Larson has argued for a date between January, 1593, and May, 1594. The play is essentially a medley of motives and incidents drawn from folk tales. Thus the main incident of the pursuit of Delia and

her rescue from the conjuror gives the earliest extant version of a tale found also in a section of Christopher Middleton's *Chinon of England* (1597) and in Milton's *Comus*. All three are modified forms of the folk tale *Childe Rowland*, in which the youngest of three brothers rescues his sister from the elf king after the other two have failed. In the play the successful brother is replaced by a suitor and his helper, who come from a tale of "The Lady and the Monster" type. Peele probably followed some form of it closely, for the main incidents and most of the details of the Euminides plot appear in one version or another of a modern folk tale which is best known as one of the components of *Jack the Giant Killer*. A stock motive in the tale of this type is that of "The Grateful Dead," which Peele used in its most conventional form--the ghostly helper exacting a promise of half the hero's gains and as a test of loyalty demanding that the rescued lady be cut in two. In this form the motive is found, much earlier than the play, in *Oliver of Castile*, translated from French and printed in England in 1518. Still another folk tale introduced in the play is *The Three Heads of the Well*, with its contrasted sisters, which is linked to the main thread by the marriage of the sisters to two who have failed in the quest for Delia. While Peele possibly found many of these various incidents already combined in some folk tale which he followed, evidently he made modifications in the details. For instance, the contrast between the husbands of the two sisters in *The Three Heads of the Well* has been subordinated in the play to the treatment of them as stock comic figures, one a clown and the other a braggart. Though the induction, as in *The Taming of the Shrew* and *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, satirizes the taste of the audience, its primary purpose here is to indicate the source of the material in folk tale. The name Sacrapant and some of the lines in the play came from Greene's *Orlando Furioso*, derived from Ariosto.

George Peele's 'Farewell to Arms':

His golden locks Time hath to silver turn;
O Time too swift, O swiftness never ceasing!
His youth 'gainst time and age hath ever spurn'd,
But spurn'd in vain; youth waneth by increasing:
Beauty, strength, youth, are flowers but fading seen;
Duty, faith, love, are roots, and ever green.
His helmet now shall make a hive for bees;
And, lovers' sonnets turn'd to holy psalms,
A man-at- arms must now serve on his knees,
And feed on prayers, which are Age his alms:
But though from court to cottage he depart,
His Saint is sure of his unspotted heart.
And when he saddest sits in homely cell,
He'll teach his swains this carol for a song,–
'Blest be the hearts that wish my sovereign well,
Curst be the souls that think her any wrong.'
Goddess, allow this aged man his right
To be your beadsman now that was your knight.

Peele had a reputation among his peers of living dangerously regarding his sexual and emotional life, and he died at the age of forty of Syphilis, or 'the pox,' as it was then called.