

CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE  
(1564 - 1593)

Marlowe is one of the most suggestive figures of the English Renaissance and the greatest of Shakespeare's predecessors. The glory of the Elizabethan drama dates from his *Tamburlaine* (1587) where in the whole restless temper of the age finds expression:

"Nature, that framed us  
Of four elements  
Warring within our breasts  
For regiment,  
Doth teach us all to have  
Aspiring minds:

Our souls - whose faculties  
Can comprehend  
The wondrous architecture  
Of the world,  
And measure every  
Wandering planet's course,  
Still climbing after  
Knowledge infinite,  
And always moving as  
The restless spheres -

will us to wear ourselves and never rest."

Tamburlaine

Pt I, II, VII

Life - Marlowe was born in Canterbury, only a few months before Shakespeare. He was the son of a poor shoemaker, but through the kindness of a patron was educated at the town grammar school and then at Cambridge. When he came to London his soul was surging with the ideals of the Renaissance, which later found expression in Faustus, the scholar longing for unlimited knowledge and for power to grasp the universe. Unfortunately, Marlowe had also the unbridled passions which mark the early, or Pagan Renaissance, as Taine calls it and the conceit of a young man just entering the realms of knowledge. He became an actor and lived in a low-tavern at

most phase of excess and wretchedness. In 1587, when but twenty-three years old, he produced 'Tamburlaine' which brought him instant recognition. Thereafter, notwithstanding his wretched life, he holds steadily to a high literary purpose. Though all his plays abound in violence, no doubt reflecting many of the violent scenes in which he lived, he develops his "mighty line" and depicts great scenes in magnificent bursts of poetry, such as the stage had never heard before. In five years, while Shakespeare was serving his apprenticeship, Marlowe produced all his great work. Then he was stabbed in a drunken brawl and died wretchedly, as he had lived. The Epilogue of Faustus might be written across his tombstone!

"Cut is the branch that

might have grown full  
straight,  
And burned is Apollo's  
laurel bough  
That some time grew  
within this learned  
man!"

The end.

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