

CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE

LIFE (1564 - 1593)

Christopher Marlowe was born in 1564 in Canterbury Kent. He was well educated and attended University at Cambridge. As a University Wit he came into contact with the Latin classics, as well as with the works of Italian and French writers. In 1583 Marlowe graduated and in 1587 he left Cambridge for London. There he took up the profession of playwright and was soon hugely successful thanks to *Tamburlaine the Great*, the story of a tyrant craving for military power. He was killed in a tavern quarrel and almost certainly his death, at the age of twenty-nine, was not accidental, but linked to spying activities.

ACHIEVEMENT

Marlowe is held to be one of the major dramatists of the Elizabethan Age. His work may be seen as one of the links between the Mediaeval morality play and the drama of the Renaissance. His reputation also rests on his establishment of **blank verse** (a sequence of ten syllables, one unstressed followed by one stressed) as the metre for English tragedy.

Tamburlaine was soon followed by *Doctor Faustus*, the story of another rebel aspiring to a superhuman status, and by *The Jew of Malta*, centred on a character aspiring to unlimited riches. Marlowe's plays have often been called "one-man tragedies" because they focus on a single character and his will to absolute power.

DOCTOR FAUSTUS

Marlowe tells the story of a man, John Faustus, who feels he has reached the limits of human understanding. In exchange for absolute knowledge, Faustus agrees to surrender his soul to Lucifer at the end of a twenty-four-year period. During these twenty-four years Faustus's mood alternates between moments of doubt and moments of pleasure occasioned by dubious magic spells: Mephistopheles enables Faustus to become invisible to play a joke on the Pope, to woo the ghost of the beautiful Helen of Troy, and to watch a parade of the Seven Deadly Sins.