

### UNIT 3. Empire and the end of the century

- ◆ Speaking in particular of those Modernists centred in London, Malcolm Bradbury has said that "what, despite their extraordinary differences of temper and intention, unites them is a prevailing sense of dislocation from the past, and a commitment to the active remaking of the art". They would all of them be spurred by a Nietzschean desire to establish a new order upon new values, and by a commitment to re-form contemporary ethics as well as the prevailing social and political sphere through their aesthetic efforts. The obsession with morality which is rife in Victorian literature points to a central crisis of that age, the crisis of Belief versus Unbelief.
- ◆ So while it is true that Darwin, Huxley, Spencer, and Mill were themselves instrumental in bringing about the slow death of many Victorian sacred cows, not least the theological, by the end of the nineteenth century they too had become the engines of a *Weltanschauung* the Modernists were to find extremely uncongenial. A pervasive desire to find some way out of the oppressive moral impasse and to finally settle the feud between science and faith began to be felt toward the end of the century. The 1890s in particular are characterized by a search for a more accommodating world-view.
- ◆ Perhaps no figure outside of the art could have had as much influence within it as that beleaguered Viennese psychologist, Sigmund Freud. Freud served to link the psychological and material science of the 19th century to a peculiarly 20th-century predilection for interior exploration. His insights into the conscious motives of behaviour and his daring exposure of the formerly unspeakable sexual component of personality pushed open a new window on human nature. Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) and *Three Essays on Sexuality* (1905) both purported to describe and explain in a scientific manner the bizarre and irrational manifestations of the mind; yet viewed in another way, they seem a development of the Symbolist, and later Modernist impulse to delve into mysterious areas of the psyche, including the tendency to look for meanings through association, to give credence to dreams and hallucinatory experiences. certainly Virginia Woolf's psychology can have derived as easily from Dostoevsky as from Freud, while E.M. Forster's philosophy is no more a transcription of G.E. Moore. Yet the atmosphere in which the writers lived was saturated with ideas that their acute and sensitive minds could hardly fail to absorb.
- ◆ With the old certainties torn away, the Modernists felt convinced they had arrived at some unique juncture of destiny. It seems clear that insofar as Modernism was concerned with interior consciousness, with subject-object relations, and with the heightening and intensification of experience, it shares something crucial with Romanticism. Forster, establishing 'a filial dependence on the Romantic poets', invokes Shelley in calling his second novel *The Longest Journey*. And Virginia Woolf, who ranks among the great innovators in Modernist fiction, pioneered techniques whereby the interior flow of consciousness, and the evanescent subterranean nature of personality might gain priority over 'the stable ego of the past'.
- ◆ Freud himself believed that his theories had struck the latest blow against human vanity, **the first being Copernican cosmology**, which had displaced humankind from the centre of the astronomical universe, and **the second Darwinian evolutionary theory**, which had removed it from the centre of the biological universe.

- ◆ Freud's system originates in 19th-century biology and physics, particularly in Hemboltz's dynamic theory of energy that holds that energy cannot be destroyed but can only be transformed into other states. Drawing upon this notion of undestroyable energy, Freud formulated a dynamic psychology, one of whose key points is that whenever a psychic drive or urge is suppressed, repressed or driven below (or out) of consciousness, its energy inevitably appears elsewhere.
- ◆ This, for F., explains why people experience what he calls 'uncanny' feelings of doubleness that consists of a sense that something strange coexists with what is most familiar inside ourselves.