Locke (17th c): dismissal of rhetorics as the enemy of philosophical truth–

* digression: Locke does use rhetorical figures, it is impossible to speak without metaphors, there is no essential difference between *literal*, *philosophical* or *ordinary* language that is supposed to convey the truth on the one hand, and *metaphorical* or *literary* language on the other. <- this 20th claim is influenced by the re-reading of

Nietzsche: *On Truth and Lie in an Extra Moral Sense* (1873)

“What is truth?”

“A moving army of metaphors, metonymies and athropomorphisms, in short a summa of human relationships that are being poetically and rhetorically sublimated, transposed, and beautified until, after long and repeated use, a people considers them as solid, canonical, and unavoidable. Truths are illusions whose illusionary nature has been forgotten, metaphors that have been used up and have lost their imprint and that now operate as mere metal, no longer as coins.”

Truth is *constituted* by rhetorical figures. Further, these rhetorical figures form an army, so there is something powerful and violent in them. -> “will to power” (cf. later: Foucault)

What do they have to do with truth? Nietzsche argues that the language of Western metaphysics is replete with rhetorical figures: philosophers “grasp” a problem, “bring the truth *to light*”, “enlighten”and “reflect” uponcertain things (light usually stands for knowledge and truth.) Also, we tend to anthropomorphise things as if they were similar to us: the leg of the table, the arm of the clock, the heart of the problem or matter, or God itself –> as if we, human beings were the centre of the universe ->the universe becomes a human-centred set of meanings. -> we *constitute* truth with language, and do *not* describe it. -> performative dimension of language. If rhetorical figures are constitutive of the world (they shape it, and endow it with the coherence that it lacks), and they cannot be escaped, then is there any difference between “literary” (rhetorical) and “ordinary” (or philosophical) language?

Nietzsche: human-centeredness, the subjective interpretation of the world is not truth but an illusion. Yet this is an illusion the illusionary nature of which has been forgotten – we use metaphors and antropomorphisms without being aware of it, and we do not know that the illusion they give of order and coherence is a lie. Yet, there is no other way: 1.) it is impossible to devise a language that would be devoid of rhetorical figures. 2.) language inescapably constitutes the reality around us.

-> as opposed to Locke, Nietzsche argues that there is no opposition, no difference between philosophical language that is supposed to convey the truth on the one hand, and literary language, or rhetorics that Locke dismisses as lie on the other. All language, even the language of philosophy is metaphorical, and is *constitutive* (rather than descriptive*)* of truth.

-> influence on deconstruction: there is a gap between “reality” and “language”-> language constitutes truth and there is no way to “grasp” or “express” “reality”. I.e. language precedes reality.

Paul Ricoeur: The Rule of Metaphor (1975): inherent metaphoricity of language + metaphors redescribe and reshape reality, they create new insights and new meanings-> a happy thing!

* end of digression

England: 18th c.

1. Scotland: New Rhetoric – revival or rhetorics: Hugh Blair: *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783) at the University of Edinburgh. Advocates the study of rhetoric, and lays down the rules of good style, eloquence and public speaking as a resource for social success. Method: rhetorical analyses of written texts (Classical Greek and Latin authors, Milton, Sidney, Shakespeare, French Classic Tragedy, Robinson Crusoe, Tom Jones, etc.). Resembles today’s “English for Specific Purposes”.

e.g.:“Critical examination of the Style of Mr Addison in No. 411 of the Spectator”:

“’Our sight is the most perfect, and most delightful of all our senses’. This is an excellent introductory sentence. It is clear, precise, and simple. [he goes on o describe the style]… In this manner we should always set out. A first sentence should seldom be long, and never an intricate one.”

2. Non-academic traditions of criticism:

1. Poetic advice to young authors (e.g. Pope’s *Essay on Criticism*)
2. Journalism, periodical essays: to form the taste of the “common reader” through appreciation, commentary and evaluation. (e.g. 18th c. Addison’s and Steele’s periodical essays in *The Spectator*)-> emergence of public criticism (later, 19th c: Coleridge, Hazlitt, Matthew Arnold)
3. First attempts at canon formation (e.g. Samuel Johnson’s *Lives of the English Poets* (1779-81)*,* Thomas Warton’s *The History of English Poetry* - three centuries of English poetry put into a continuous narrative for the first time.)

The Rise of *Aesthetics*: (as opposed to rhetorics)

Germany: 18th c. rise of aesthetics as a *separate* branch of philosophy.

Immanuel Kant: epistemology – aesthetics – ethics (thoroughly separated) *Critique of Judgment* (1790): on the ways in which we judge the beautiful, i.e. the (mental) possibility conditions of judging the beautiful - aesthetics [1787: *Critique of Pure Reason* – the true - epistemology; 1788: *Critique of Practical Reason* – the good – ethics]

-“aesthetic judgement” is always *disinterested*

Beauty is what pleases without interest (i.e. without moral or sensual interest (desire), and without any epistemological purpose, i.e. truth)

e.g. a horse. when I aesthetically judge a horse, I do *not* ask what it is good for (its use value), *nor* do I ask whether I like it (sensual interest), *nor* whether it is a morally good or bad horse (moral interest). I only ask whether it is beautiful or not. Every object can be judged in many different ways (such as: is this representation of the horse true to reality? or is it morally good?), but aesthetic judgement is different from all other kinds of judgements: it cannot be subsumed under any abstract concept. E.g. Hamlet is exemplary, but we cannot determine he is the example of “what”.

- aesthetic judgement is always subjective (it does not reside in the object, but in the beholder – i.e. the horse can be judged in many different way, but it’s up to me how I judge it, if I judge it aesthetically, or not).

- Sensus Communis: although aesthetic judgements are subjective, they have *universal validity.*

- aesthetic judgement is always autonomous (i.e. disinterested – see: above)

-> Later (!): *autonomy of the work of art* itself (Kant does not speak much about art, he still speaks about the way we make aesthetic judgment)

-> Art (incl. literature) ceases to have an obvious function, its practice and enjoyment is an end in itself, removed from any social purpose. “Art” starts to be seen as something separate from society. Previously, people wrote poems, produced plays or painted paintings for a number of purposes (money, fame, persuasion, entertainment, etc). Literature had basically a social function. Now, these concrete, historically variable pieces are put under the label “art” and the experience of them was called “aesthetic experience”. Beauty is seen as an unchanging, transcendental feature of certain pieces labelled with the term aesthetic.

Friedrich von Schiller: *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1795): art is the domain of the freedom of the imagination, and offers us a solace as against the wrongs of the real world. Art reconciles the antagonisms between sense and intellect, nature and reason. The *Letters* open with a political analysis of contemporary society and in particular of the French Revolution and its failure to implement universal freedom. Since human beings cannot rise above the fetters of their time without education, and since the *means of education can be art only*, he conceives of art as a vehicle, one that over time will *improve humankind* and set the individual free from the constraints and excesses of either pure nature or pure mind. The function of art must be to educate and elevate the human race toward this ideal, if unattainable, position, through aesthetic experience.

19th c. England: Romantic period – poetry is no more a simple verse form: creativity, imagination, vision, transcendence, ideal (as against utilitarian ideology of industrialism), poet = genius (above ordinary people). The literary work comes to be seen as a mysterious, transcendental organic unity, in contrast to the fragmented individualism of the capitalist marketplace. Literature is seen as a realm separate from the everyday world, yet, it still has the capacity to transform society, to pave the way for the ideal. Cf: Shelley’s *A Defence of Poetry* (1819)*:* the mission of poetry is “the partial apprehension of the invisible world” and poets are the “unacknowledged legislators of the [real] world.”

However: literature or aesthetics are *not* yet subjects taught at universities. ->

19th c. universities:

1.) rhetorics (cf: Hugh Blair above)

2.) philology - originates from Germany: the evolution of languages, historical study of the development of English language, phonetics, dialectology, comparative mythology, ethnology (e.g. Causabaum in *Middlemarch*)

1887: Henry Nettleship (Professor of Classics at the University of Oxford): *The Study of Modern Languages at the University of Oxford*: the study of English literature (-) cannot equal the study of the classics (+), only the historical study of the development of the English language is rigorous enough as a subject in its own right. -> 1893: first degree course in English at the University of Oxford: subjects like German, Old English, and the history of the language. Poetry is merely a source of examples for rhetorical figures, or of how English was used in Shakespeare’s time, and novels are not worthy of study. Most of the students are women, which fulfils the idea that English is for the “less able”, who are unable to cope with the great works of classical civilisation.

Introduction of English (literature) as a discipline in its own right: In India

1835: English Education Act – East India Company: officially makes English the medium of instruction in Indian education, and requires the study of English literature

English has a *civilising mission* (religion failed, Indians could not be converted to Christianity)– English Literature is taught to the Indian population as a mould of the English way of life, morals, taste - > training of good and faithful company servants, who consent to their own oppression (cf. later: Gramsci) (and today: Indians are still the best circketers)

Victorian period England: English lit. (as literature) is *not yet a university discipline*, but a new concept emerges that paves the way for its 20th c. emergence as a university subject: culture/cultivation (!)

S. T. Coleridge (*On the Constitution of the Church and State* 1829): [C]ivilisation is itself but a mixed good, if not far more a corrupting influence, the hectic of disease, not the bloom of health, and a nation so distinguished can more fitly be called a varnished than a polished people; where this civilisation is not grounded in *cultivation*: the harmonious development ofthose qualities and faculties that characterise our *humanity.*”

Matthew Arnold: from the Preface (1875) to *Culture and Anarchy*: “The whole scope of the essay is to recommend culture as the great help out of our present difficulties; *culture* being a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all the matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world” -> ”culture” replaces religion

“The Study of Poetry” (1880): “More and more mankind will discover that we have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us. Without *poetry*, our science will appear incomplete; and most of what passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry.”

Function of poetry: interpretation of life (epistemological function); consolation: it also makes sense of of a life without guidance (religion). Poetry sustains and guides us in a world governed by science and technology, by money, by personal interests.

“The Function of Criticism at the Present Time” (1865) Criticism: “a disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world.”

disinterestedness in Matthew Arnold : culture frees us from personal social or political interests – it offers a truth, a morality that transcends history and politics. It makes us better people – it instructs us how to be a good person, by offering us ahistorical truths. Since it deals with universal human values it does not deal with such historical “trivia” as actual civil wars, the actual oppression of women, actual poverty, actual social problems <- culture is the product of the creative individual (the genius) who elevates himself above temporal and spatial determinations. This view that it is possible for someone, even for everyone to free him or herself from social and historical determinations is the basis of liberal humanism.

Arnold communicates, in fact, the moral riches of a middle class civilisation, and a reverence for middle-class achievements. Culture becomes a means of social control, since religion starts to fail in this respect (cf: Victorian period as a period of religious doubt, Darwin, etc).

John Churton Collins: *The Study of English Literature* (1891):

“The people need political culture, instruction, that is to say, in what pertains to their relation to the State, to their duties as citizens; and they need also to be impressed sentimentally by having the presentation in legend and history of heroic and patriotic examples brought vividly and attractively before them”

->Literature serves the British imperialist interests

All this can be achieved without the cost and labour of teaching the “people” the Classics. English literature is in their own language, and is conveniently available to them. Since it works though sentiment and emotion, it can fill in the gap left by religion.

English, as an academic subject is first institutionalised not at the Universities, but at the Mechanics Institutes, and in working men’s colleges. It becomes part of adult education, of the education of the working classes. (<- means of social control)

20th c.:

After WW I -> German influence (philology) declines -> England’s victory over Germany means a renewal of national pride, plus the trauma of the war: meaningless massacre. Literature turned into a solace, and an alternative to the nightmare of history. English became not only *a* subject, but *the* supremely civilising subject, the spiritual essence of social formation.

In 1917, a group of lecturers at Cambridge University came together to introduce radical innovations in their university’s mainly philological curriculum.

E.M. W. Tilyard (1889-1962) and I.A.Richards (1893-1979) want to create a subject that would study English literature in its own right, not just a source of examples of how English was used in Shakespeare’s time, or as pale imitations of Greek and Latin works. As the intellectual inheritors of Arnold, they believe that literature would restore a sense of humanity to the world, in the face of modernity, of the growth of dehumanising technology and the machine age.

1921: “The Newbolt Report”: “literature is not just a subject for academic study, but one of the chief temples of the Human spirit, in which all should worship.”

Lord George Gordon, 1922: "England is sick, and … English literature must save it. The Churches (as I understand) having failed, and social remedies being slow, English literature has now a triple function: still, I suppose, to delight and instruct us, but also, and above all, to save our souls and heal the State"

* rise of “Practical Criticism” (see: later)

What did these people consider as “literature”? Which authors? What kinds of works? If literature has indeed a civilising mission, then what kinds of written works are able to fulfil this mission?

Canon: great texts that we should read and admire.

origin: biblical writings established as authorised (Council of Trent, 1546).

18th c.: debates over the worth of particular writers. Joseph Warton (1722-1800): “in the first class, I would place only thee sublime and pathetic poets: Spencer, Shakespeare, Milton”

19th c.: first anthologies of poetry. E.g. *The Golden Treasury of English Verse* (1861) ed. Francis Turner. -> authority to decide which poems should be considered the most valuable.

T. S. Eliot, “Tradition and Individual Talent” (1919):

“Tradition … cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour. It involves, in the first place, the historical sense, which we may call nearly indispensable to anyone who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year; and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. … No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead.”

Tradition = canon (present in the mind of the great writer) – challenge to the Romantic idea of originality (-> strong presence of intertextual references in Eliot’s own works)

The tradition (i.e. canon) is “the storehouse of Western values” -> for Eliot: Western values = universal human values

F.R. Leavis: *The Great Tradition* (1948)*.* the “great English novelists are Jane Austen, George Eliot, Henry James and Joseph Conrad” - “they are significant in terms of that human awareness they promote: awareness of the possibilities of life” they have "a vital capacity for experience, a kind of reverent openness before life, and a marked moral intensity "... (a bit too vague)

Harold Bloom: *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973)*:* all writers struggle against the influence of the past. Because a poet must forge an original poetic vision in order to guarantee his survival into posterity, the influence of precursor poets inspires a sense of anxiety in living poets. A small minority of 'strong' poets manage to create original work in spite of the pressure of influence, by trying to repress the strong precursor poet’s influence. -> The history of poetry is a history of poetic rivalry.

Elitist position, favours the Western canon, as well as high culture as against popular culture (<-high culture can save us in the midst of our “present difficulties” – Arnold) - see later: Practical Criticism, New Criticism, beginnings of Deconstruction.

The assumption that Western values are “universal” is challenged with the rise of cultural studies:

Rise of cultural studies: after WW II.

questioning of existing definitions of culture as necessarily high culture. Culture (-) vs. culture ( +). The investigation of all kinds of signifying practices, including popular culture, working class culture, and all forms of social practices. Considers “high culture” (Arnold’s “culture”) as elitist, conservative, ideological, escaping existing social antagonisms.

2 sources:

1. Roland Barthes: *Mythologies* (1957): reading of a range of cultural practices (e.g. professional wrestling, advertising of cars, fashion, drinking of French wine, etc) to show their social implications. (i.e. “connotations”)
2. Raymond Williams: *Culture and Society* (1958) – shows the *historical emergence* of the concept of culture (high culture) as we understand it today (“culture” is not natural and universal, but historical, geographical and class specific). ->Richard Hoggart: founder of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies: it seeks to explore popular, working-class culture that had been erased because culture had been identified with high literature.

<- influenced by Marxism: vindicates the right for the “people” to have their own voice and sees culture (high culture, that is) as an oppressive ideological formation that justifies and contributes to the maintenance of the existing social hierarchies.

later: particular interest in identity formations (gender, race, class), and seeks to rewrite the canon to include minorities (gender, race, class). The binary between high and popular culture is seen as an oppressive ideological construct, so it seeks to bring them on the same level of analysis. It is “democratic”, all encompassing (reads Shakespeare with rap music) and interdisciplinary (includes sociology, political studies, etc) –> though much despised by “theorists”, it has left a great impact on the changes affecting “theory” itself.

*Toward the Decolonisation of African Literature* (1980)

“most of the objections to … the African novel sound like admonitions from imperialist mother hens to their wayward or outright rebellious captive chickens. They cluck: ‘Be Universal! Be Universal!’ And what they don’t consider universal, they denounce as anthropological, atavistic, autobiographical, sociological, journalistic, topical ephemera, as *not literary*” (Chinweizu, Onwucheka Jemie, and Ihechukwu Madubuike)

-> there is no value-free position outside a culture from which to deliver judgements. Canon is formed by those who are in a position of authority (well educated, upper class, white, European or American men), and this canon is self-perpetuating.

-> texts by female authors, authors of colour, texts belonging to popular culture are not anthologised -> not part of the canon and university curricula –> change in the 80s

<- feminists, people of colour, and from the lower classes start to have the possibility to rise to a position of authority (for instance: the gain right to university education, and, as a result, to university professorships -> rewrite university curricula – the canon – to include those who had been excluded so far)

–> “Culture Wars” at universities (particularly, U.S.)

Cultural Studies: works written by women or by people of colour or by any member of a marginal or dispossessed group have to be studied, just because they raise important questions of identity. (E.g.: what is it like to be a woman, what is it like to be a person of colour, etc.?) -> strong political agenda

Theory: C. S. approach, in itself, fails to meet the criteria for being “canonised”, i.e. to represent “aesthetic” or “literary” value (as opposed to works by Shakespeare or Wordsworth, etc). E.g. Derek Attridge’s criteria for literary “value” – politically neutral.

-> What to include in university curricula? Shakespeare? Milton? Harry Potter? Toni Morrisson? (Is “aesthetic” value enough? Is “political”/”representative” value enough?)

However: “theory”, from the 90s, starts to incorporate a political and ethical agenda – focus on the “singularity” of (“good”!) works staging marginal situations (Attridge himself writes a book entitled: *J.M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading* – Coetzee is a South African writer, his books often stage the effects of colonisation. Derrida, having re-read Locke and Plato in the 70s and 80s, starts to engage with the contemporary problems of democracy, immigration, terrorism, etc. from the 1990s. )