canvases from earlier years. I was sorry that Marmor did not balance these examples with a paragraph or two on El Greco, whose elongated studies are no longer said to derive from astigmatism.

Exceptional as this book is, it is unfortunate that the author did not include a chapter on Degas’s sculpture. We know not only that his eyesight deteriorated as he matured, but also that he turned increasingly to sculpture in his later years. Since it is well documented that tactile sensitivity increases with the loss of visual acuity, the book would have benefited from some discussion of this aspect of Degas’s working process. Touch was briefly mentioned in a Halévy account of Degas but overall receives little exposure throughout the text. Also, in terms of process, it seems Degas’s working relationship with photography should have been included. His enthusiasm for the medium influenced his motifs, as the recent exhibition “The Artist and the Camera: Degas to Picasso” demonstrated. Reading through the book, I wondered if Degas’s photographic documents might offer some insight into how he coped with his failing vision. Finally, I wish the book had included an index.

In summary, Degas Through His Own Eyes is a book that underscores the fact that theories about art often underplay the degree to which a visual artist sees the work through his or her own eyes. A thin book, filled with first-rate reproductions, this essay successfully conveys what Degas may have seen as he worked. To Marmor’s credit, reproductions are scaled so that we are able to get a sense of size/scale relationships. Non-specialists will find the book accessible. Like Degas scholars, they will find much to ruminate on in each chapter.

A CULTURE OF FACT: ENGLAND, 1550–1720

Reviewed by Stefaan Van Ryssen, Hogeschool Gent, Jan Delvinlaan 115, 9000 Gent, Belgium. E-mail: <stefaan.vanryssen@pandora.be>.

Over the past decades, critical observers and suspicious citizens have learned to mistrust reports about the facts of military campaigns, corporate (ir)responsibility, royal mishaps and scientific success. The media, we have gradually come to understand, are as easily creating certain “facts” as they are hiding certain others from public view. Misters Bush and Blair “know for a fact” that the former Iraqi regime was producing and hiding weapons of mass destruction, and it is a well-known “fact” that man never walked on the moon. Yes, Elvis lives. As a matter of fact, I have met him at a recovery center in the South of France where Princess Di has gone into hiding, too.

Facts are no longer facts, it appears, but how did they ever become facts in the first place? What does this overworked four-letter word—derived from the Latin “factum,” or “man-made thing”—really stand for? When was it used and what were the events or pieces of information that received this seemingly untouchable label? Who elevated mere descriptions, stories, anecdotes and gossip to the semisancion position of the undeniable, solid and foolproof status of factual evidence?

Barbara Shapiro, a professor of history in the Graduate School at the University of California, Berkeley, re-traces the early history of the concept of “fact” in the United Kingdom in the 16th and 17th centuries. It started in the courts, where judges and judges were urged by early modern thinkers to ground their verdicts on facts as witnessed by reliable and trustworthy observers. Sir Thomas More and Sir Francis Bacon—himself a professional lawyer—among many other lesser known philosophers, contributed to the advancement of the “fact” in the legal arena, although it may come as a surprise that they thought gentlemen to be more reliable than commoners and men more trustworthy than women.

In a matter of decades the concept gradually spread from law to historiography, choreography and travel reporting. By the end of the 16th century, reporters of “marvels,” “wonders” and other “news” in the periodical press had adopted the practice of quoting witnesses and their antecedents to support the factual status of their stories. With the founding and the development of the Royal Society, “facts” became part and parcel of scientific discourse. Finally, at the beginning of the 18th century, the use of the word had become so common in English culture that it appeared even in religious texts.

Barbara Shapiro has taken the work of Shapin and Shaffer (see Leviathan and the Air Pump: Hobbes, Boyle and the Experimental Life [1985]), a landmark work on the development of early scientific thought and on the societal nature of science and knowledge) to heart and clearly demonstrates how the fact originated in law, not in science, and how this epistemological concept moved from one realm to the other, reshaping the structure of knowledge in its wake. She does so in eight thematically arranged chapters rather than one chronologically ordered narrative, giving enough side information for the reader to get the complete picture.

Shapiro draws from a truly formidable range of references, appropriately organized in the footnotes to keep the prose clear and readable, and she strikes a balance between “factual” description and epistemological interpretation. This makes the book a good read for both historians and amateurs—in the modern sense—of intellectual and cultural history.

ANECDOTAL THEORY

Reviewed by Stefaan Van Ryssen, Hogeschool Gent, Jan Delvinlaan 115, 9000 Gent, Belgium. E-mail: <stefaan.vanryssen@pandora.be>.

Jane Gallop is a professor of English and Comparative Literature at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee. Along with some books on feminist literary theory in the deconstructivist tradition, she has also published Feminist Accused of Sexual Harassment, describing and analyzing an intriguing episode of her campus life when she was accused of harassment by two of her failing students. The accusation came to nothing—obviously the students had wanted to take revenge on her—but it left a bitter mark on Gallop’s life and perhaps a blemish on her career.

This “anecdote,” as Gallop herself calls it, is central to the first half of this book of nine essays. This time, however, it is not the story itself that gets the emphasis but the way it is treated in several texts. The author has left the facts behind her to concentrate on what might be learned from the way the facts are dealt with. The way theory is constructed (?) by means of the deconstruction of the anecdote is what interests her. And she constructs her theory with wit and elegance.