use of alchemical products—pigments, solvents, and so on—to capture the practice of alchemy itself" (219). As such, they testify to marketing strategies on the artist's part to develop a specific subject matter that turned away from traditionally satirical images of alchemists in order to differentiate himself from rival painters in Haarlem and other towns. In Drago's view, alchemy offered Wijck "a particularly potent tool for building artistic identity" (240).

A review as brief as this one cannot really do justice to the many contributions of *Painted Alchemists*, a book that is informative and convincing on so many levels. Nevertheless, objections could be raised to some of Drago's positions. To mention just one, the author's claim that Wijck's subject matter relates to conceptions of modern painting that Gerard de Lairesse later codified cannot be correct. Lairesse's classicist-informed exposition of modern painting has little in common with Wijck's art. On the contrary, the clutter and detritus frequently on view in his pictures would have offended Lairesse's sensibilities; in his art treatise he actually rails against such phenomena in a section entitled, "Of the Use and Abuse of Painting." The use of *modern* in connection with Wijck's art has much more in common with conceptions of the term that arose in the 1620s and 1630s in relation to genre painting in Haarlem, as Pieter Biesboer has outlined.

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Renaissance Futurities: Science, Art, Invention. Charlene Villaseñor Black and Mari-Tere Álvarez, eds.
Oakland: University of California Press, 2020. x + 238 pp. $34.95.

Renaissance Futurities consists of eight essays and an editorial introduction designed to support and illustrate the proposition that, in the words of the editors, an interest in "futurity," by which is meant an awareness of "fame and posterity," "theorizations of the future," and possible "prospective events," were key components of Renaissance thinking in literature, in science, and in artistic theory and practice (3). To this end the editors have assembled a gallery of transdisciplinary expertise, embracing the fields of museology, literary studies, engineering, medicine, media studies, history, and art history, with the emphasis falling squarely on the latter discipline. So, this is a volume that looks back in order to try and capture its many and varied subjects in the act of looking forward, anticipating a future history that they would not, of course, live to see.

Inevitably, a project such as this is caught up in the problem of exporting a reading of the images, texts, and events of the European sixteenth century (which is where the majority of the essays are focused) in the light not of futurity, so much as the essayists'

predilection of mapping the present back into the past. At its best, this can result in some startling and unsettling revisions to the usual dynamic of intellectual history. Peter Matussek's chapter on the Renaissance memory theater and the ways in which that idealized device (of which no physical trace remains) may be thought of as anticipating the modern study of human computer interaction (HCI) and the work of contemporary media artists, shows this methodology at its best. The operation of the memory theater (which was both named as such and virtually resurrected in the work of Frances Yates in the mid-1960s) caught the attention not so much of scholars, many of whom were decidedly lukewarm about Yates's inventive descriptions of a hitherto-undiscovered country of hermeticism and the occult, but of artists, avant-garde composers, poets, and philosophers turned novelists, to say nothing of the MIT engineers in the 1970s who wrote of the "Simonides effect": "the ancient principle of using spatial cueing as an aid to performance and memory" (57). Thus, a sixteenth-century system for organizing knowledge, revived in the mid-twentieth century, turns out to have been (in Matussek's phrase) a "backward-looking prophecy" of the digital age (64).

At their best, the essays in *Renaissance Futurities* achieve what Matussek does so well: present an early modern text or set of images as anticipating a raft of modern (or even postmodern) ideas or inventions. As such, some of these essays become provocative thought experiments, akin to counterfactual histories that turn out to be (in some measure) factual. Mari-Tere Álvarez's "Moon Shot," subtitled "From Renaissance Imagination to Modern Reality," explores the beginnings of "Early Modern space-colonizing science fiction" (12), as though a restless, devouring, European colonizing impulse at work in the New World could not be confined to mere terrestrial limits and had set its eyes even further afield. The moon—that object of devotion among Platonically inclined poets such as Sir Philip Sidney—became a fantasy land for John Donne's satire on the Jesuits establishing a moon-based branch of Roman Catholicism in 1611. Similarly, William Eamon's "Medicine as a Hunt" explores the emerging metaphor of the hunt as a means of understanding the quest for new information, plants, animals, minerals, and (distressingly, though Eamon has rather less to say about this) peoples, in a way that anticipated the modern framing of scientific research as a "hunt" for "cancer cures, chemical elements, and new cures for deadly diseases" (117).

Not every essay, however, quite manages to hit the bold mark proposed by the book's idea of futurity. On occasion, contributors become tied a little too closely to an idea of inevitable progress, rooted in some earlier model, which turns out to be only very distantly related, perhaps through chance, accident, or coincidence, to a Renaissance precursor. But *Renaissance Futurities* has a teasingly compelling quality in its quirky determination to think things through backwards. And in one respect, the future has already overtaken futurity: these essays (we're told) were assembled out

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of a summer colloquium held in a "picturesque, fifteenth-century chateau" (ix) in Missilac in northwestern France in 2017. In our new age of abandoned conferences, Zoom meetings, and Covid-19 travel restrictions, that bucolic setting for an academic gathering already looks like ancient history.

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The Story of Meshal Haqadmoni and Its Extant Copies in 15th Century Ashkenaz. Simona Gronemann.
Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2019. xx + 194 pp. €54.

The Hebrew *Meshal Haqadmoni* (Fables from the distant past [*MH*]) is a collection of fables written between 1281 and 1284 in Spain by Isaac ibn Sahula. *MH* represents both a long-standing engagement with the fable genre within a Jewish context and a window into thirteenth-century Spanish culture and politics. *MH* constitutes an important testament to the rich Jewish literary culture of the Middle Ages, and its transmission history illustrates a vibrant transcultural exchange between the two centers of medieval European Jewish life: Sepharad (the Iberian Peninsula) and Ashkenaz (Central Europe). The earliest copies of *MH* are five illustrated fifteenth-century manuscripts from Germany and Northern Italy.

Simona Gronemann's monograph presents a thorough engagement with these fifteenth-century manuscripts (held in Oxford, Munich, Milan, and Jerusalem) in relation to the historical and cultural background of *MH*. Gronemann argues that the iconographic program of these manuscripts represents an intercultural dialogue between the two distinct Jewish traditions, as well as with the surrounding non-Jewish cultures. To date, researchers have mostly focused on the written text of *MH* and its relation to the Jewish and non-Jewish fable tradition, as well as to the Spanish historical-political context, often consulting only one or, at most, two manuscripts (e.g., Jonathan P. Decter, Sara Offenberg, Revital Refael-Vivante, David Wacks). Through the lens of art history, Gronemann offers a novel approach that underscores the value of placing these five manuscripts in dialogue with one another.

While the monograph highlights Gronemann's expertise in art history, in particular in manuscript illuminations and incunabula woodcuts, the section on literary history and the textual analysis are the study's shortcomings. First, these chapters lack a consideration of medieval literary conventions and fictions, evident in Gronemann's claim that the text serves as a reliable historical source providing accurate information about its author: "The most direct and untainted information we have about the author of *MH* is from the text itself. . . . In the introduction he tells the reader that he used to lead a free roaming life, wandering about in many countries" (6). Second, her discussion of non-