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Chair, Anthony Alessandrini (Kingsborough Community College & City University of New York)

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Allison Leigh Kanner-Botan (University of Chicago), *Maddening Love: Islamic Thought and the Ethics of Desire in the Legend of Layla and Majnun*

Allison Leigh Kanner-Botan's dissertation, "Maddening Love: Islamic Thought and the Ethics of Desire in the Legend of Layla and Majnun," is a thoughtfully argued and beautifully written comparative analysis of the centuries-old story of Layla and Majnun. Using an interdisciplinary approach that combines subtle close readings of Arabic and Persian literary texts alongside insights drawn from queer theory and animal studies, Kanner-Botan examines the transformation of the most famous love-story of Islamic cultures from its seventh-century Arabic beginnings to its emergence as a canonical Persian romantic epic. Along the way, she uses her comparative skills to present us with an argument for understanding the radical potential of love as cross-cultural, culminating in a reading of Neẓāmī's early 13th Century revisioning of Layli and Majnun that centers on the idea of love as an ethical commitment that leads to a vision of community not defined by biological kinship or the requirements of premodern citizenry. Kanner-Botan's dissertation is not just an extraordinary work of comparative analysis but also a stirring meditation on the radical power of love.