

**GOD IS THE MIDDLE TERM:
KIERKEGAARD'S VIEW OF EROTIC LOVE**

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Abstract

The topic of this thesis is Kierkegaard's view of erotic love. Kierkegaard is concerned with proper love among believing Christians and I will restrict myself to that issue. The main questions of my thesis are: What, for Kierkegaard, is erotic love? What are its requirements? Is it achievable? What I am concerned is to understand whether and how, in Kierkegaard's view, erotic love is compatible with Christian faith, and even more strongly, requires Christian faith. My final conclusion will be an optimistic one: erotic love is indeed a real possibility for human beings.

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Abbreviations

CA

The Concept of Anxiety, Kierkegaard's Writings 8, trans. Reidar Thomte, in collaboration with Albert B. Anderson, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980

EO

Either/Or, 2 vols., *Kierkegaard's Writings* 3–4, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987.

FT

Fear and Trembling, in *Fear and Trembling and Repetition, Kierkegaard's Writings* 6, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983.

JN

Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks, general ed. Bruce H. Kirmmse, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007.

JP

Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, assisted by Gregor Malantschuk, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, (Vol. I) 1967, (Vol. II) 1970, (Vols. III–IV) 1975, (Vols. V–VII) 1978.

PV

The Point of View for My Work as an Author, Kierkegaard's Writings 22, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998.

R

Repetition, in *Fear and Trembling and Repetition, Kierkegaard's Writings* 6, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983.

SLW

Stages on Life's Way, Kierkegaard's Writings 11, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988.

WL

Works of Love, Kierkegaard's Writings 16, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995.

To love God is to love oneself truly; to help another person to love God is to love another person; to be helped by another person to love God is to be loved.

(Soren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, p.107)

Introduction

The topic of my thesis is Kierkegaard's view of erotic love. Kierkegaard addresses various love relationships such as those between friends, neighbors, or between human beings and God. Erotic love is love between human beings that involves a physical (or we might say sexual) component. Kierkegaard is concerned with proper love among believing Christians and I will restrict myself to that issue. The main questions of my thesis are: What, for Kierkegaard, is erotic love? What are its requirements? Is it achievable? My final conclusion is an optimistic one: erotic love is indeed a real possibility for human beings.

It is worth mentioning here briefly why one might be tempted to think, as some commentators do, that Kierkegaardian erotic love is an impossibility for us mortals.¹ It is impossible, according to these interpreters, because it involves contradictions in our attitudes and actions. For example, erotic love requires closing oneself up and opening oneself at the same time and toward the same object. I will argue against this view. Kierkegaardian erotic love is indeed achievable because, like in faith, both of these movements can be done at one and the same time.

I should also mention at the outset an interpretive problem having to do with the various texts by Kierkegaard that relate to the issue of erotic love. As I will explain below, I view *Works of Love* as the guiding text and Kierkegaard's earlier works as playing an important but lesser role.

Before continuing here, I find it helpful to sort out the various types, forms and classes of love that will be under discussion. First, Kierkegaard discusses human love, not God's love for humans. All human love is self-love just in the sense that human love involves the structure

¹ E.g., Amy Hall (2002)

inherent in human beings of the self – a topic that I won't address further here. Next, there is a distinction in Kierkegaard between true, or proper (these are synonymous) love, on the one hand, and improper love on the other hand. Improper love is not really love, for Kierkegaard, but only taken to be love by people who deceive themselves. While all human love is self-love, some self-love is selfish, while some self-love is unselfish. All improper love is selfish and all non-faith based love is improper love. All proper love is self-denial's love, that is, it denies selfish self-love, and all faith-based love is proper love. What is really at issue for Kierkegaard and for my thesis is proper love. Proper love is based on (Christian) faith. Proper love is always unselfish.

Proper love is non-preferential in the case of neighborly love. Whether preferential love (love for friends and erotic love) can be proper is a subject of controversy. I will argue that it can be preferential and non-preferential. Our love for our fellow human beings, called by Kierkegaard neighborly love, is not preferential; it treats all human beings as the same. Erotic love, like love for friends, is preferential in making distinctions between those we love and those we don't.

What I am concerned is to understand whether and how proper erotic love, which as explained is preferential and physical, is compatible with Christian faith, and even more strongly, requires Christian faith.

First, I argue in this paper that *Works of Love* is the central text in Kierkegaard's oeuvre about his positive view of erotic love. I show that according to Kierkegaard true love always comes about within the context of faith. By contrasting love as expounded in *Works of Love* with *Either/Or*, *Stages on Life's Way* and *Fear and Trembling's* treatment of love, I show that *Works of Love* is the only Kierkegaardian locus that analyzes what love amounts to in the context of faith. Second, I argue that the notion of erotic love in *Works of Love* is consistent with the idea of true love in the context of faith. Kierkegaard distinguishes between worldly selfish self-love and proper

unselfish self-love of the Christian teaching. For Kierkegaard erotic love is a form of self-love. I argue for an interpretation of *Works of Love* according to which when God is the middle term in an erotic love relation then this instance of erotic love is of the proper unselfish kind.

Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) wrote extensively on the topic of love. *Works of Love* (1847) is explicitly and entirely dedicated to this topic. *Either/Or* (1843) and *Stages on Life's Way* (1845) approach their subject matter, the spheres or stages of existence by contrasting esthetic, ethical and religious ways of loving. *Either/Or* addresses the esthetic stage in the first, 'Either' part of the text and the ethical stage in the second, 'Or' part.

The esthetic stage is symbolized by esthetic love, the sensuous, immediate, pleasurable kind, and represented in *Either/Or* by the love of Johannes the Seducer. *Repetition* (1843) is another short text on esthetic love. It recounts the Young Man's failed attempt at love. In fact every attempt at love in every text written before *Works of Love* is a description of a failed attempt at love. The only possible exception is the Merman story of *Fear and Trembling* (1843).

The ethical stage is symbolized by ethical love, the committed, life-long kind, and represented in *Either/Or* by the love of Judge William. *Stages on Life's Way* in the first third of the text recaptures the esthetic and ethical stages by revisiting characters of *Either/Or* and *Repetition*: the Seducer, the Young Man and the Judge.² It addresses the religious sphere of existence in the last two thirds of the book.

Stages on Life's Way urges us to transcend the esthetic and the ethical by way of the religious. While Quidam is the protagonist lover of *Stages on Life's Way* his love falls short of faithful religious love because stuck in resignation he is unable to make the movement of faith.

² Constantin Constantius and the Fashion Designers are also esthetic lovers in *Stages on Life's Way*. For the purpose of contrasting esthetic love with the message of *Works of Love* I find it sufficient to explore the story of Johannes the Seducer with a brief mention of the Young Man. The Fashion Designer and other esthetic lovers are all very similar with respect to their sensuous and lustful kind of love.

Briefly appearing on a few pages at the end of *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard's signature book on faith, the Merman is Kierkegaard's only character in whose regard he considers faithful love as a possibility.

George Pattison and Stephen Evans, to name just two of the most influential contemporary interpreters of Kierkegaard, have authored many studies that question the hostile interpretation of Kierkegaard's view of love.³ For them Kierkegaard's *Works of Love* is the locus for understanding his view of love. *Love's Grateful Striving* (2001) by M. Jaime Ferreira is the most recent and most detailed book-length study dedicated to the entire text of *Works of Love*. However, even the recent sympathetic accounts of Kierkegaard's view of love neglect treating specifically erotic love's importance in the Danish thinker's oeuvre. The only two book-length studies on Kierkegaard's view of erotic love in English are Sharon Krishek's *Kierkegaard on Faith and Love* (2009) and Amy Laura Hall's *Kierkegaard and the Treachery of Love* (2002). The novelty in Hall and Krishek is not only that they focus on Kierkegaard's view of erotic love but also that they both study all of Kierkegaard's relevant texts about erotic love, not just *Works of Love*. They analyze and compare love stories in *Either/Or*, *Stages on Life's Way*, *Fear and Trembling*, etc.

Hall argues that the interpretation of these stories must be informed by a reading of *Works of Love*. Krishek disagrees: ultimately the interpretation must go beyond the confines of *Works of Love*. Hall's interpretation of the love stories is pessimistic: "As we become involved in the misguided lives of Kierkegaard's characters and are pulled into his allegations against human love,

³ Kierkegaard's view of love has drawn severe criticism. Georg Lukacs in a 1910 essay, 'The Foundering of Form Against Life: Soren Kierkegaard and Regine Olsen' dismisses Kierkegaard's treatment of love both in his philosophy and in his failed engagement with Regine as the result of his general disposition for melancholy and pessimism. Theodor Adorno in a 1940 study argues that love in Kierkegaard is far removed from reality and that his treatment of it is callous and misanthropic. (p.423) Knud Ejler Logstrup, Denmark's most renowned philosopher after Kierkegaard, includes a polemical chapter in his 1956 influential book *The Ethical Demand*, entitled 'Settling accounts with Kierkegaard's *Works of Love*.' However, in recent years Kierkegaard's view of love has been the subject of renewed interest and of more sympathetic interpretation.

we are to surmise that the possibility of true love depends on a factor beyond our own present capacities." (2002, p.9) Believing in or acting on paradoxes and contradictions is beyond our capacities. To open and close oneself to the beloved at the same time, which are the two movements required for true love according to Kierkegaard, is not within human reach. Her judgment of erotic love in *Works of Love* is similarly pessimistic: "it is erotic love's necessary annihilation that Kierkegaard describes in *Works of Love*." (2002, p.114) Krishek's reading on the other hand is optimistic; she concludes that faithful love is a real possibility for everybody. (2009, p.187) She is explicit about her disagreement with Hall:

Here, of course, I present a position opposed to that of Amy Laura Hall . . . Her gloomy conclusion, which is based on her choice of *Works of Love* as the Kierkegaardian locus from which to learn about romantic love, is therefore consistent with my interpretation of *Works of Love* as presenting only a partial view, and of the need to complete its vision by listening attentively to what Kierkegaard says in *Fear and Trembling*.⁴ (pp. 187-88)

Thus in the work of these two interpreters there are two points of contention in evaluating Kierkegaard's view of erotic love. First, is *Works of Love* the locus for finding out about his positive view of erotic love? Second, is erotic love according to Kierkegaard an achievable prospect in human life? These two questions structure my paper.

Sections 1 and 3 focus on the first question, sections 4 and 5 on the second. Section 2 is an interpretive summary of *Works of Love* as relevant for Kierkegaard's view of erotic love. I feel this summary is necessary to understand subsequent sections for a reader unfamiliar with the text

⁴ Krishek uses 'romantic' love in the sense of erotic love.

of *Works of Love*. Section 1 provides several reasons for why *Works of Love* is the sole locus for interpreting Kierkegaard's positive view of erotic love. Section 3 investigates the theme of erotic love in *Either/Or*, *Stages on Life's Way* and *Fear and Trembling*. I compare and contrast the failed love stories in these works with the message of *Works of Love*, particularly the call that in any proper love relation God must be the middle term. Section 4 concludes that erotic love is true unselfish love if and only if God is the middle term between lover and beloved. Section 5 is an exploration of the idea of proper erotic love as an idea of love in which God is the middle term.

1. *Works of Love*: the sole locus for Kierkegaard's positive view of erotic love

There is a conflict among interpreters about which work to take as central in reconstructing the notion of erotic love in Kierkegaard. Krishek argues that the “locus” of Kierkegaard's positive view of erotic love is not *Works of Love*. (2009, p.188) She is vague about which work we should recognize as this exact locus, but she seems to be inclusive in her view: both *Works of Love* and *Fear and Trembling* and perhaps other pseudonymous works are all part of the locus. Hall implicitly assumes that *Works of Love* is the sole locus. The locus question is significant because Krishek claims that if we take *Works of Love* as the sole locus for our interpretation then we will necessarily find Kierkegaard's view of erotic love pessimistic. I argue to the contrary: *Works of Love* provides an optimistic view of erotic love. In this section I will give several reasons for why *Works of Love* is the sole locus for understanding Kierkegaard's positive conception of erotic love.

First, I argue in section 3 of this paper that *Either/Or*, *Stages on Life's Way* and *Fear and Trembling* all anticipate an investigation of love within the context of faith. The notion of erotic love found in these works is of the improper kind. The ultimate reason for why the lovers' love is improper is that they lack faith. Only lovers who have faith are capable of proper erotic love. *Works of Love* is Kierkegaard's only investigation of love within the context of faith. It seems to follow that we should take *Works of Love* as the locus for understanding Kierkegaard's positive view of erotic love.

Second, *Works of Love* is Kierkegaard's only signed work about love. The rest of his works on the topic of love are all pseudonymous works that are signed by imaginary figures. For example, *Either/Or* is a collection of two sets of “papers”: A's papers (A is often interpreted as the Young

Man)⁵, which include the diary authored by Johannes the Seducer, and B's papers, which are in fact letters to A (B is explicitly William the Judge). The collection of papers is edited by Victor Eremita (Latin for 'Victor the Hermit'). A legitimate question seems to emerge: Is *Either/Or* representative of Kierkegaard's view? In a journal entry he answers in the firm negative:

I hereby retract this book [Either/Or]. It was a necessary deception in order, if possible, to deceive men into the religious, which has continually been my task all along. Maieutically it certainly has had its influence. Yet I do not need to retract it, for I have never claimed to be its author. (JP X 1A192)

Kierkegaard claims that he invented the pseudonymous figures as voices for his "indirect communication." (PV, 56, 66) He argues in *The Point of View* that direct communication will not be understood by a delusional audience so he must resort to indirect communication because his audience is in fact delusional. Indirect communication deludes in order to remove delusion.

But what does it mean to delude? For Kierkegaard:

It means that one does not begin directly with what one wishes to communicate but begins by taking the other's delusion at face value. Thus one does not begin . . . in this way: I am Christian, you are not a Christian – but this way: You are a Christian, I am not Christian. Or one does not begin in this way: It is Christianity that I am proclaiming, and you are living in purely esthetic categories. No, one begins this way: Let us talk about the esthetic. The deception consists in one's speaking this way precisely in order to arrive at the religious. But according to the assumption the other person is in fact under the delusion

⁵ See, e.g., Storm

that the esthetic is the essentially Christian, since he thinks he is a Christian and yet he is living in esthetic categories. (PV, 54)

The pseudonymous works delude by way of denying their Christian motivation. But Kierkegaard believes that thus he is "continually unclear" in his pseudonymous works and as a result he must make the "transition" from his "previous authorship" to the signed works because he clearly sees the "relation between direct communication and decisive Christianity." (JP VI 6248; PV, 167) First, *Works of Love* is Kierkegaard's only signed work of direct communication on the topic of love; second, it is decisively Christian. It follows that according to Kierkegaard's own account his argument is 'clear' only in *Works of Love*. This seems to suggest that pseudonymous works cannot, and indeed *Works of Love* must be the locus for interpreting Kierkegaard's view of love. This is, of course, not to say that the pseudonymous works do not provide some relevant insight if read carefully.

Krishek would reply that it is a mistake to conclude that "Kierkegaard's 'real', or 'valid', opinions were expressed only, or principally, in the context of his works of direct communication." (2009, p.141) The main reason why this conclusion is problematic is "because the core of some of Kierkegaard's most important ideas can be traced back to his pseudonymous writings, and in some cases their expression in these writings is particularly lucid and illuminating." (Krishek 2009, p.141) However, if *Works of Love* is the locus for interpreting Kierkegaard's view of erotic love, this does not entail that "important ideas" from the pseudonymous works are dismissed. In fact, as I argue in section 3 of this paper that the most important idea about erotic love in the pseudonymous works is that it is due to the lovers' lack of religiosity that their love ultimately falls short of proper erotic love. That is, the main idea is that erotic love functions properly only within the context of

faith. *Works of Love* is an exploration of love within the context of faith. It seems to follow that *Works of Love* should be the locus for understanding Kierkegaard's idea of proper erotic love.

Third, the pseudonymous works before *Works of Love* are about a subject matter different from love, e.g., *Fear and Trembling* is about faith, *Either/Or* and *Stages on Life's Way* are about the spheres of existence. While love may be an important theme in some of these works, they are not about love *per se*. *Works of Love* is the only text by Kierkegaard whose subject matter is explicitly and exclusively about love. It seems to follow that *Works of Love* has unmatched significance in the entire oeuvre with regards to the philosopher's views about love.

Fourth, in works published after *Works of Love* Kierkegaard is not occupied by the topic of erotic love anymore. This somewhat suggests that Kierkegaard put to rest the issue in the last work in which he is eminently concerned about erotic love, that is, *Works of Love*. After *Works of Love* he makes up no more love stories and he barely mentions erotic love. The phrase "erotic love" is mentioned at a mere six times in works published after *Works of Love*.⁶ These six places do not improve on the argument in *Works of Love*; they rather passingly mention erotic love. Kierkegaard wrote *Works of Love* years after he first became preoccupied with the topic of love. His unhappy love affair ended when he broke off his engagement to Regine Olsen in 1841, a particularly important episode in his life that defined his authorial interest in love. Pseudonymous works that dealt with the topic of love in substantive ways followed. The signed *Works of Love* was published last in 1847 in the series of works that address the issue of love. In 1847 Kierkegaard had already lived many years reflecting on his deep love affair gone wrong. At that point he had already explored the many facets of love through his imagined characters in his pseudonymous works. For many years he wrote and published extensively on the topic of love; this came to a

⁶ I counted these places in the *Cumulative Index to Kierkegaard's Writings* edited by Howard V. and Edna H. Hong, the English translators of all of Kierkegaard's works in the Princeton series.

sudden halt with the publishing of *Works of Love*. Given that *Works of Love* is his only work dedicated in subject matter to love, and the only one he signed with his name, and that after writing this pivotal book on love he is suddenly not concerned about the topic of love anymore in his later publications, I must conclude that he indeed communicates his definitive views on erotic love in *Works of Love*.

Krishek might reply that a philosophical analysis of Kierkegaard's works should not be informed by the author's biographical details, including the timeline of his publications, but only by his "words." (2009, p.140) Any biographical data is irrelevant according to Krishek. (2009, p.140) But I suggest that the timeline of his publications as relevant for the topic of erotic love matters. There is usually some kind of change in every author over time. For example, we distinguish between young and old Lukacs and Heidegger, and early, middle and late dialogues of Plato. The point here is not that *Works of Love* as a signed text indeed belongs to a different authorial period than the pseudonymous works. Rather, the point is that, even if *Works of Love* did not belong to a different authorial period, the fact that years of reflection took place before the writing of *Works of Love*, the fact that after its publication Kierkegaard is not occupied by the topic of erotic love anymore and the fact that in publications before it love was never an explicit and exclusive topic must be taken into account if we are to correctly assess the role of *Works of Love* in Kierkegaard's thinking about erotic love.

Finally, while Krishek argues that the Merman's love story points away from *Works of Love*, I argue that it is a link from *Fear and Trembling* to *Works of Love* through the theme of faith. Thus the Merman story must not be disregarded insofar as it makes this important connection, but contrary to Krishek, I do not take it to be the locus of interpretation. I make this argument in section 3.

2. Exposition of Erotic Love in *Works of Love*

In this section I give a brief summary of Kierkegaard's substantial, 400-page *Works of Love* as relevant for his view of erotic love. This summary is necessary to understand subsequent sections of this paper because I will use concepts and ideas introduced here.

Kierkegaard in *Works of Love* presents a web of various types of love. Kierkegaard's basic theological assumption is that "God is love."⁷ (WL, 62, 190, 281, 364, 376) That is, true love is ultimately found only in God; "God has truth's and infallibility's infinite conception of love." (WL, 190) But *Works of Love* self-reflectively states that it is concerned "not with God's love but with human love." (WL, 301) Human love is self-love but even "a noble, self-sacrificing, magnanimous, human love . . . still is not Christian love." (WL, 120) Christian love is "true love," it is "self-denial's love." (WL, 52, 369, 372-3) Self-love is "sensuousness"; erotic love, a kind of "preferential love in passion or passionate preference," is in fact "another form of self-love." (WL, 53) Preferential love includes erotic love and friendship.

According to the Preface, *Works of Love* is a Christian deliberation not on love but on the works of love. Kierkegaard contrasts deliberation with discourse. While an upbuilding discourse captures, reassures and strengthens an essential understanding of its subject matter, a deliberation does not suppose that people in any way are familiar with its subject matter. A deliberation is a "gadfly" that "must not so much move, mollify, reassure, persuade, as awaken and provoke people and sharpen thought." (JP I 641) The power of a deliberation should annoy and stir people disrupting their ordinary pattern of thinking.

⁷ "He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love." (1 John 4:8)

Furthermore, the Preface declares that the book is not about love *per se*, but about the works of love. Love *per se* is God ("God is love") and as such "indescribable," ineffable; therefore, a treatise on love *per se* would be a wasteful enterprise. Works of love are acts performed with love and are the way in which God as love perceivably manifests itself in the lives of Christians. Kierkegaard essentially agrees with Luther in that salvation is prior to human works of love. Works of love are the necessary outpouring of salvation; one is so full of grace that one must find a means to express it through performing works of love. That is, works of love are inalienably related to being a true Christian. As a result Kierkegaard concludes *Works of Love* sharply by rejecting Lutheranism: "truly a profession of faith is not enough [to be a Christian]." (WL, 375) But he also concludes by rejecting the idea of meriting salvation through works.⁸

In the first chapter, 'Love's Hidden Life and Its Recognizability by Its Fruits,' Kierkegaard affirms that love eludes direct inquiry; it only may be known by its fruits, i.e., its manifestations. We cannot know directly if someone loves or not. Hall observes: "the surest fruit of the reader's own love is his or her ability to see others as loving." (WL, 27) We must learn to trust because love is not otherwise detectable. Love hides, it lives in the invisible, inner realm. Love may be recognized by its fruits but the fruits do not exhaust the depth of what love is. "Like is known only by like; only someone who abides in love can know love." (WL, 16) Furthermore, Kierkegaard sets out here the fundamental distinction between Christian love and other types of love, including erotic love. Erotic love is in time and therefore temporal; Christian love is beyond time and eternal.

⁸ Salvation, according to Kierkegaard, is *in faith* (as opposed to 'in professing faith'). It is best depicted by the story of the biblical patriarch Abraham in the book of Genesis. Abraham's passionate faith in the narrative of sacrificing his own son Isaac is praised by the pseudonymous author of *Fear and Trembling* Johannes de Silentio as the ultimate expression of faith. Abraham, the paragon knight of faith, has a paradoxical and absurd faith in God, but this lends him "the courage to think a thought whole." (FT, 60) This vision of whole is at the heart of the Abraham narrative. The partial explanations, including that of philosophy, are transcended in the wholeness of vision *in faith*.⁸ Religion offers the only holistic point of view. Genuine works of love can only originate from this holistic vision.

Does this mean that erotic love cannot be Christian love? No, because Kierkegaard also maintains that God must be the middle term in any love relationship, including erotic love, but God is the middle term only in love relations that meet the requirements of Christian love. Kierkegaard seems to make contradictory claims in *Works of Love*, and virtually all interpreters agree that it is indeed the case that Kierkegaard contradicts himself in this text.⁹

The second chapter illuminates the threefold command of love: "You *Shall* Love" (II.A), "You Shall Love the *Neighbor*" (II.B), "You Shall Love the Neighbor" (II.C). Kierkegaard here makes the claim that Storm calls the "most striking" in the entire book: God commands us to love. This indeed seems impossible to be reconciled with our deep seated intuition that love is freely given and cannot be demanded since even when we intend to we cannot bring ourselves to love. Love on this view is an inclination not to be commanded. Erotic love as sung by the poets seems to be "something far higher than this poor: 'You shall love.'" (WL, 29) It is an ordinary fact that lovers ask each other to swear their love, but Kierkegaard says that we can only swear by something higher. "[T]hen God in heaven is the only one who is truly in a position to swear by himself." (WL, 30) Eternal love needs no swearing or testing in time since "it is self-evident that it exists . . . and only the transient can give itself the appearance of enduring continuance by standing a test." (WL, 32) Kierkegaard argues that we are able to love someone eternally only when it is a duty to love.

Spontaneous love can change; eternal love cannot. The possibility of change in erotic love is the source of anxiety, but this anxiety is hidden; its only expression is the "flaming craving." (WL, 33) But there is worse than this burning passion; for example, to lie to ourselves that we can take things lightheartedly in love, or to resolve that we not feel sorrow in love anymore. These

⁹ For more on the contradictions in the text and interpreters see p.49

self-comforting tools rather exacerbate despair. But the commandment to love forbids all types of love that lead to anxiety or despair. First of all this commandment forbids "selfish self-love" (WL, 151) and teaches "proper self-love." (WL, 18) Loving the neighbor is the same thing as loving yourself properly. Following the commandment to love the neighbor as yourself "wrest[s] from you the self-love that Christianity sadly enough must presuppose to be in every human being . . . [and thus] you have actually learned to love yourself."¹⁰ (WL, 22-23) Furthermore, the commandment precludes jealousy since jealousy "loves as it is loved" (WL, 35), but the duty to love commands simply that we love, irrespective of how we are loved.

Only commanded love is independent from the accidental features of the beloved since "only duty is liberating," while erotic love "makes a person free and at the next moment dependent." (WL, 38) The ability to break the love relation is not a sign of independence:

If when another person says, "I cannot love you any longer," one proudly answers, "Then I can also stop loving you" – is this independence? Alas, it is dependence, because whether he will continue to love or not depends upon whether the other will love. But the person who answers, "In that case I shall still continue to love you" – that person's love is made eternally free in blessed independence. (WL, 39-40)

The poet praises love as the best thing that can happen to anybody; the Christian author praises love as the cornerstone of Christian ethics. Dutiful love is a "moral task." (WL, 51) Although commanded, this love is free because it is free from inclination and because it is not restricted by self-love. Erotic love is a form of self-love and it loves the beloved as the "other-I;"

¹⁰ I will return to the problem of self-love when I discuss conceptual issues in section 4.

dutiful love is self-renunciation's love and it loves another as the "other-you" or the "first you."
(WL, 53, 57) It is through the definition of self that we can distinguish different types of love:

In erotic love the *I* is defined as sensate-psychical-spiritual; the beloved is a sensate-psychical-spiritual specification. In friendship the *I* is defined as psychical-spiritual; the friend is a psychical-spiritual specification. It is only in love for the neighbor that the self, who loves, is defined as spirit purely spiritually and the neighbor is a purely spiritual specification. (WL, 56-57)

Kierkegaard introduces the terminology that in love "God is the middle term" in this chapter. (WL, 58) Only through loving God and realizing that He is always in between two human beings that one may love another properly. Proper love recognizes that by virtue of this special relationship to God we are all equal.

But, alas, in the life of actuality one laces the outer garment of dissimilarity so tight that it completely conceals the fact that this dissimilarity is an outer garment, because the inner glory of equality never or very rarely shines through as it continually should and ought.
(WL, 87)

Those who only see essential dissimilarity, which is the majority of people according to Kierkegaard, do not recognize our special relation to God. Very importantly, however, in everyday life Christian love does not entail the abolition of differences:

Christianity allows all the dissimilarities of earthly life to stand . . . it wants the dissimilarity to hang loosely on the individual, as loosely as the cape the king casts off in order to show who he is, as loosely as the ragged costume in which a supranatural being has disguised himself (WL, 72, 88)

If we see God as the middle term then we see human beings as equally worthy of love and we are following the love commandment. This is an important point about the idea that in a proper love relationship God is the middle term and in the final section I will further discuss this point.

It is a common experience in erotic love that we see the perfections of the beloved. But Kierkegaard asserts that perfect love is perfect not because its object is perfect. In fact if love is determined by its object then it is not Christian love. "Erotic love is defined by its object;" Christian love is "defined by love." (WL, 66) However, Christian love seems to be at odds with the way love usually functions in the world and, therefore, it is rejected by ordinary people. Eternal love seems to be irreconcilable with our experience of distinctions. Yet, Kierkegaard emphasizes, human beings are equal only in the eternal.

The third chapter focuses on the unavoidable relationship between love and God's law. Love is the fulfilling of the law. No love, including erotic love, can be withdrawn from the law, the God relationship.

[T]hrough a strange misunderstanding many perhaps think that they need God's help to love the neighbor, the less lovable object, but when it comes to erotic love and friendship they get along best by themselves – alas, as if God's intervention here would be disturbing and inconvenient. (WL, 112)

We suffer from the delusion in everyday life that we can love one another without God as the middle term. But *Works of Love* seeks to "penetrate the illusions . . . within the daily situations of life, precisely where the illusions are at home." (WL, 124) God is the middle term in every proper love relationship;¹¹ Christianity "takes possession of every other form of love" (WL, 140):

Your wife must first and foremost be to you the neighbor; that she is your wife is then a more precise specification of your particular relationship to each other. (WL, 141)

Erotic love must be dependent on Christian love. Through this subordination Christian love "transforms [improper] erotic love" (WL, 143), and even improper "erotic love [becomes] a matter of conscience." (WL, 140)

Kierkegaard concludes the First Series of *Works of Love* with the idea that if we love then we are in "infinite debt" to God. (WL 102) We must be infinitely grateful to God if we may love properly, since it is only through His grace that our infinitely inferior love may be transfigured into Christian love.

Chapter IV of the Second Series contends that erotic love errs in clinging to the beloved should it be the case that her "distinctiveness" requires that it let go. (WL, 273) Loving the beloved's or one's own uniqueness (as in self-love) is not in itself wrong; indeed everyone's uniqueness is "God's gift," and it is one's divine mission "before God to be oneself." (WL, 271) What is wrong though is the inability of letting go if required. If it is required the lover must be able to sacrifice her love.

¹¹ See p.44 for a discussion of what it means that God is the middle term in a love relationship

Chapter VI "Love Abides" comments that improper erotic love "is temporality's most beautiful but nonetheless most frail invention," it is for "this life," it fades away. (WL, 311) But Christian "love abides – it never wastes away." (WL, 311) One may stop loving a person erotically and start to love another, and in this way one may be said to continue to love erotically despite the break in a love relationship. However, one may not withdraw Christian love from anyone and be said to continue to love Christianly. If there is the possibility that love might be withdrawn, it was not love in the first place. This contrasts love with any possession that you may give away:

For example, a man may have had money, and when it is gone, when he no longer has money, it still remains just as certain and true that he *has had* money. But when one ceases to be loving, he *has never been loving either*. (WL 303)

Kierkegaard allows that erotic love may cease but concludes that since it may do so "in the highest sense erotic love is not love and not the highest." (WL, 311) The love that abides must take Love (who is God) as the middle term. The love relationship must have a triadic form to abide because erotic love may fail but if God is the middle term this failure does not prevent the lover from continuing to love the beloved through God.

The last chapter (X) proposes that love can be appreciated only in self-denial. "The work of praising love must be done outwardly in self-sacrificing unselfishness." (WL, 365) God's grace is revealed to us only if we do away with our selfishness. In this self-renunciation the lover may only rely on God. The lover knows that "he is nothing before God" and that "right where he is he is before God." (WL, 365) Self-denial's unselfish love and self-love's selfish love will be important concepts in section 4.

What we should see in this section is a number of different articulations of what makes proper erotic love different from improper erotic love. Most crucially, in proper erotic love the accidental features of the beloved, such as her being beautiful or funny, are not the ground of love. The ground of proper erotic love is God who appears in the love relation as the middle term.

3. When God is not the middle term

Works published before *Works of Love*, particularly, *Either/Or*, *Stages on Life's Way* and *Fear and Trembling*, do not provide examples of successful love. The lovers in these works do not love in faith and this is the reason why they fail to rise to the requirements of proper love. But these instances of love should be very familiar to us: we know them from our lives, the novels we read, the plays we see. While these love stories only provide negative instances of love, understanding and contrasting them with ideas from *Works of Love* help illuminate the possibility of the positive instances of love.

Johannes the Seducer

Johannes the Seducer is the author of the *Diary of the Seducer* found in the first, esthetic part of *Either/Or* and he reappears at the banquet of esthetic lovers in *Stages on Life's Way*. I identify two ways in which the love of the Seducer, esthetic love, falls short of proper erotic love in light of my reading of *Works of Love*: its happiness remains anchored in the moment, i.e., it lacks eternity; and it is based on an imaginary idea of the beloved removed from her actuality. I suggest that *Works of Love* prescribes us the remedy to take God as the middle term.

The name Johannes is related to the Italian Giovanni (or Spanish Juan), which is the name of Don Giovanni (or Don Juan), the paragon seducer in European consciousness and protagonist of "The Immediate Erotic Stages," a previous chapter in *Either/Or*. Like Don Giovanni, Johannes consumes woman after woman. Johannes believes that no woman is a victim of his practice; rather, it is a woman's purpose to be seduced in love. And it is the nature of seduction that it is temporary,

as opposed to the ethical which, according to the second part of *Either/Or*, is committed and long-lasting.

The banefulness of an engagement is always the ethical in it. The ethical is just as boring in scholarship as in life. What a difference! Under the esthetic sky, everything is buoyant, beautiful, transient; when ethics arrives on the scene, everything becomes harsh, angular, infinitely *langweiligt* [boring]. (EO1, 368)

The esthetic is for the moment and for the momentary recollection of the past. The ethical is for the future and for repetition. The Seducer wants to avoid boredom and find the excitement of the first encounter. But esthetic love by definition cannot last. Yet he is not aware of his own esthetic condition and exclaims: "Why cannot such a night last longer?" (EO1, 445) But he is unable and unwilling to commit beyond the momentary. Recollection indeed necessitates that the beloved be lost and precludes her actuality. Johannes's imagination is sustained by the beloved's absence. The Seducer is similar in this respect to the Young Man of Kierkegaard's other short treatise about the esthetic stage, *Repetition*. The Young Man is deeply in love but he only experiences this love as recollection. The actuality of his beloved is unimportant because he does not intend to realize the love relationship beyond this recollection. The pseudonymous author Constantin Constantius declares: "If the girl dies tomorrow, it will make no essential difference." (R, 136) Her entire "actuality," including whether she lives or dies, has no effect on the quality of the Young Man's love; it is pure recollection. (R, 185, 201) The Seducer similarly finds pleasure in the moment of recollection, but unlike the Young Man who retreats into seclusion in order to escape the consequence of love, he resolutely chases again and again that moment of 'first love.'

The preference of the moment is starkly contrasted by an emphasis on the eternal in *Works of Love*. We may properly love only by respecting our eternal and infinite indebtedness to God. We must transform our selfish erotic love to eternal love so that it may become proper erotic love. The momentary is the ground for change. Change is the ground for despair. But despair is incompatible with true love. "[L]ove is eternally and happily secured against despair." (WL, 40) Only through self-renunciation and by retreating into the eternal that the esthetic love of the Seducer may be corrected. Only the eternal may defeat the momentary:

[W]hen a person in the infinite transformation discovers the eternal itself so close to life that there is not the distance of one single claim, of one single evasion, of one single excuse, of one single moment of time from what *he* in this instant, in this second, in this holy moment *shall* do – then he is on the way to becoming a Christian. (WL, 90)

In the figure of the Seducer I see a strong rejection of Kierkegaard's contemporary, Stendhal.¹² According to his description of love as crystallization in *On Love* (1822) the lover seeks proof of the perfection of the beloved in his imagination. He 'wildly overrates' her beyond reality. (Stendhal 2013, p.23) Stendhal observes that if you throw a bare branch of tree in the salt mines of Salzburg and return in a few months, you will find it covered with salt crystals. The original branch is not visible anymore; you can only see the crystallized branch. The same process of crystallization of the beloved with her perfections occurs in the eyes of the lover. Very similarly, Kierkegaard's Seducer revels in his imagination of the beloved:

¹² George Pattison argues that Kierkegaard's *Diary of the Seducer* amounts to the rejection of Friedrich Schlegel's *Lucinde*. The pleasure gleaned from the transgressive and sensual erotic relation inspired by Schlegel's real-life relation to divorcee Dorothea Veit remains in the momentary and esthetic sphere portrayed by the Seducer. But Schlegel and Veit got married in 1804, a commitment the Seducer is never able to make.

I can become furious at the thought that she disappeared before me the second time, and yet in a certain sense I am glad of it. The image I have of her hovers indefinitely somewhere between her actual and her ideal form. I now have this image before me, but precisely because either it is actuality or actuality is indeed the occasion, it has a singular magic. (EO1, 332)

In *Stages on Life's Way* Johannes reaffirms the importance of imagination: woman is "a whim from a man's brain, a daydream." (SLW, 75) However, Kierkegaard in *Works of Love* rejects self-indulgent fantasizing about the beloved.

When it is a duty to love the people we see, one must first and foremost give up all imaginary and exaggerated ideas about a dreamworld where the object of love should be sought and found – that is, one must become sober, gain actuality and truth by finding and remaining in the world of actuality as the task assigned to one . . . in loving the actual individual person it is important that one does not substitute an imaginary idea of how we think or could wish that this person should be. (WL, 161, 164)

To enjoy love through the imagined perfections of the beloved is "intoxicating." (WL, 161) But the imagined construction of the beloved is a self-deceiving endeavor; instead of toiling to understand the complex reality of the beloved, the lover worships his projection of her. Kierkegaard denounces such projection as a mistake because it has "the closed eye of forbearance and leniency that does not see defects and imperfections." (WL, 162) Moreover, the Seducer's love is thievery:

Purely human love is continually in the process of flying away after, so to speak, or flying away with, the beloved's perfections. We say of a seducer that he steals a girl's heart, but of all purely human love, even when it is the most beautiful, we must say that it has something thievish about it, that it really steals the beloved's perfections (WL, 173)

The cure to the self-deceptive practice of projection we are prescribed in *Works of Love* is to strip the beloved of her imagined perfections and see her as we see our neighbors: completely equal before God. We are required to turn inward, away from our projection to see the neighbor in our beloved. The neighbor thus becomes, in Kierkegaard's parlance, the *middle term*, or the *third*. However, selfish erotic love "always has this unconditional characteristic – that it excludes the third – that is, the third means confusion." (WL 50) The difference between the Seducer's love and proper erotic love is "a world of difference, the difference of inversion." (WL, 162) When it is a duty to love:

You see the defect, but the fact that your relationship then becomes more inward shows that you love the person in whom you see the defect or the weakness of the imperfection.
(WL, 167)

To love properly is not to transcend human imperfections, but to lovingly forgive them. When the neighbor is the middle term in erotic love "forgiveness puts another's guilt behind his back." (WL, 296) The lover must learn to forgive because imperfections and sin abound in the beloved. Forgiveness is a real possibility only if God is the middle term in the love relationship.

In conclusion, if true love is to be obtained, esthetic, sensuous love must give way to spiritual love. Johannes the Seducer is stuck in esthetic love, unable to move beyond those features of the beloved that he finds exciting. According to *Works of Love* esthetic love is based on self-deception. *Works of Love* explains that loving in faith entails seeing the beloved for what she is: the neighbor.

The Judge

Judge William is the pseudonymous author of the second part of the two-part (esthetic–ethical) *Either/Or* and the second part of the three-part (esthetic–ethical–religious) *Stages on Life's Way*. He writes about the ethical stage of existence manifested in the concept of marriage. In *Either/Or* marriage is future-oriented; it is a movement of repetition diametrically opposed to the movement of recollection of the esthetic stage, which is past-oriented. Marriage is committed; esthetic love is momentary. According to a most obvious interpretation of *Either/Or* the reader is asked to make a choice between the esthetic and the ethical. (Hall 2002, p.108) Moreover, William naturally associates religion with the ethical stage. However, for Kierkegaard the religious is a different existential sphere. For Kierkegaard the actual either/or choice is between the merely human and the religious. The esthetic and the ethical stages are rooted in human interests; but in religion we are grounded in faith. The Judge falls short of the religious but deceives himself about his lack of faith. This self-deception is more subtle than in the case of the Seducer. Yet perhaps for this reason existentially more dangerous: William ultimately succeeds in deceiving himself that he stands in the right relation to God; the Seducer's self-deception is limited to his love relationship.

In contrast to the Seducer the Judge does reject momentary love and praises commitment to one woman, yet he wants to incorporate somehow esthetic love into his ideal of ethical love. But esthetic sensuous love is the epitome of selfish erotic love; the Judge errs in intending to salvage it. Kierkegaard in *Works of Love* "dethrones" selfish erotic love. (WL, 45, 50) He rejects any linking of true love to the sagacious, poetic concept of erotic love. (WL, 50) To oppose the dethronement of selfish erotic love "the defense proceeds on the basis that Christianity does indeed teach a higher love but *in addition* praises erotic love" (WL, 45) However, this sagacious defender of selfish erotic love is "like a shopkeeper who carries the best grade of goods but in addition has a medium grade, which he can *also* very well recommend as almost as good." (WL, 45) Kierkegaard's claim is that Christian love wholly transforms selfish erotic love; as a consequence, esthetic love must be wholly gone from proper erotic love.

The key to understanding this transformative power of Christian love is in the Christian doctrine of sin: given our sinful nature, we are incapable of proper love, unless by God's grace. The Judge is aware of "the Church's solemn declaration that sin has entered into the world," but he believes that "from this it by no means follows that the first love¹³ is altered." (EO2, 55) He is in denial of ineluctable human sinfulness and its consequences on a love relationship. For him erotic love within a marriage is unchanged by Christian love: even worse, it subsumes esthetic love. Kierkegaard subtly and indirectly explains William's mistake in the last chapter of *Either/Or*, the "Ultimatum."

Either/Or closes with William's friend, the Jylland pastor's sermon, the "Ultimatum: The Upbuilding that Lies in the Thought That in Relation to God We Are Always in the Wrong." This sermon is key to linking *Either/Or* to *Works of Love*. *Works of Love* emphasizes our infinite

¹³ William's first love is his wife.

indebtedness to God: this is a relationship to God in which we are always in the wrong. But in spite of the fact that we are always in the wrong in relation to God, God loves us all. If one loves God one feels infinite gratitude for His undeserved love. *Works of Love* assumes the claim of the sermon that we are always in the wrong in relation to God and explores the consequences of it with regards to a proper conception of love. Krishek makes no link through the sermon between *Either/Or* and *Works of Love*, but I agree with her interpretation that ‘being in the wrong’ emphasized in the sermon does not mean sinning; rather, it is "about wishing to be in the wrong." (Krishek 2009, p.60) When we suspect that our beloved has wronged us we rather wish ourselves to be in the wrong in relation to her than suffer having to blame her for the harm. To wit, her being in the wrong means that she has been unloving toward us, a condition that the lover struggles to accept and wishes to refuse. Yet sometimes we are justified in blaming our beloved which is to say that we are not in the wrong in relation to her. But we are always in the wrong in relation to God. God, who is love, may never wrong us; but the wretched, imperfect, sinning beings humans are, we are always and ineluctably in the wrong in relation to God. The pastor realizes this; William does not.

The Judge believes that he has achieved perfect bliss and harmony with God through his marriage. He believes that he has been able to reconcile the esthetic, the ethical and the religious. He refuses to contemplate the possibility that just like the esthetic author he also might suffer from self-delusions. He also refuses to be critical of the domestic life he lives and consider the challenges and, perhaps, insurmountable difficulties that his marriage might face. He believes that it is

an insult and consequently ugly . . . to want to love in such a way that he could imagine it possible that this love could cease. . . . He does not believe it possible that the one he loves

can change, except for the better, and if it should happen he believes in the power of the relationship to make everything good again. (EO2, 301)

William refuses the possibility of losing his beloved, and even refuses to see the inevitable strains and anxieties involved in any domestic relationship. He argues that in order to benefit from his conception of marriage one must "refrain from all criticism, for a married man who writes about marriage writes least of all to be criticized." (SLW, 94) He likes to think that his utopian vision of marriage is beyond criticism. He likes to delude himself into thinking that he is "assured blessedness" in marriage. (SLW, 161)

\God as the middle term emphasized in *Works of Love* is conspicuously missing from the Judge's life. God does not come between William and his wife; rather, it is the wife that comes between William and God.

The reason she is everything to man is that she presents him with the finite; without her he is an unstable spirit, an unhappy creature who cannot find rest, has no abode. It has frequently been my delight to see woman's meaning in this way; on the whole she is to me a symbol of the congregation, and the spirit is in great distress when it does not have a congregation in which to live, and when it lives in the congregation, it is the spirit of the congregation. . . . How crude of our churches to have the congregation, provided it does not represent itself, be represented by a parish clerk or sexton. It should always be represented by a woman. (EO2, 313)

William's love is primarily that of his wife, not of God. The Judge is unable to relate to God without a mediator: he needs his wife for that. This indirect relation to God explains why William has the

feeble conception of the Christian message in general and sin in particular: in faith our sinful nature is revealed, but it requires that the single individual stand alone before God, something the Judge is incapable of doing. For Kierkegaard God is the "sole true object of love" (WL, 130). So much so, that it is not the wife who is ought to be the husband's beloved, but it is God. (WL, 121) William reverses the love imperative, does not love God or the neighbor first, but rather loves his wife first. He mistakenly sees no qualitative difference between "believ[ing] in God's love" and "believ[ing] in his own love." (EO2, 344)

It may be inferred from my above reading of *Works of Love* that mistakes like the Judge's inappropriate reliance on his wife are the result of a lack of adequate self-criticism. The Judge in honest self-inspection should realize two things: that the utopia of his undisturbed domestic bliss is an unrealistic expectation and that his self-interests are bound up in his love for his wife, i.e., his bliss erroneously depends on her and not God. His selfish erotic love has not yet been transformed by Christian love.

In conclusion, true love must surpass ethical love in its commitment to God. God is not immediately part of the relationship between the ethical lovers. William the Judge, the epitome of the ethical lover, is first and foremost committed to his wife and not God. *Works of Love*, however, instructs us that God must be the "middle term" in any proper love relation; we must love God first and love the beloved only through God.

Quidam

Quidam in *Stages on Life's Way* and the Merman in *Fear and Trembling* are both "demonic" lovers. The demonic, unlike the esthetic and ethical lovers, is not delusional about the obstacles of love;

he knows that it is difficult to love. Therefore, the demonic lover rejects reveling in the sensuous, the momentary and the immediate, to wit, the esthetic response to love and he also rejects the ethical idealization of love. Rather, he avoids love's challenge by choosing to retreat deep into his interior being, into complete isolation. Kierkegaard calls the act of retreat an "inclosing reserve" and defines the demonic just as this act. (CA, 123) The average person in love is closest to the demonic character. Just like the demonic, we are not citizens of a purely esthetic world like the Seducer, or a purely ethical world like the Judge. We vacillate between the two realms unable to make the movement of faith, the only real solution to love's challenge.

Quidam means "Someone" in Latin. Frater Taciturnus, the pseudonymous author of the third and religious part of *Stages on Life's Way* includes an imaginary diary in this text that he claims was written by Quidam, "Someone." In fact, anyone of us could be this Someone who resembles most the ordinary reader of all of Kierkegaard's failed lovers. But Someone is also different from the great majority of people in that he is highly reflective. While the rest of Kierkegaard's failed lovers, through deliberate and elaborate self-delusion, escape assuming responsibility for why they fail at a proper love relation, Someone is self-reflective enough to realize that he is "the guilty one." (SLW, 198) But instead of disclosing himself for the sinful person he is, he chooses the "inclosing reserve," a retreat into his interior psychology.

In this inclosing reserve Quidam, cut-off from his beloved Qaedam (Latin for 'Someone' in the feminine gender) and the possibility of intimacy, feels secure. Someone fears opening up not only to his beloved but to the entire "outer world." (SLW, 201) He prefers the "monastery" over the world. (SLW, 198)

For Someone "terror," and "the deepest darkness of depression" are real threats of a love relationship. (SLW, 202) Someone is completely conscious of the conditions that prevent him from entering the love relationship:

I [Quidam] do not marry to have another person slave under my depression. It is my pride, my honor, my inspiration to keep in inclosing reserve what must be locked up, to reduce it to the scantiest rations possible; my joy, my bliss, my first and my only wish is to belong to her whom I would purchase at any price with my life and blood, but whom I still refuse to weaken and destroy by initiating her into my sufferings. (SLW, 219)

Someone clearly sees himself and his beloved as inherently imperfect creatures: too proud, depressed and incapable of fidelity. (SLW, 356) Unlike the Judge, he is aware of the dark side of both the beloved and the love relationship; therefore, he is incapable of idealizing either one. But he is also incapable of honesty with his beloved, unable to share his fears with her. Rather, blaming both her and himself for their failed love, Someone chooses "subterfuge" to end the relationship. (SLW, 316) He must deceive her so that thinking him unloving she may heal. (SLW, 246) That is, Someone believes that his "inclosing reserve" and his "silence" are for the well-being of his beloved operating through a "teleological suspension" of honesty: teleological so that she may heal. (SLW, 230) Moreover, inclosing himself he believes that in complete seclusion he has found God. (SLW, 351) But *Works of Love* reveals that Someone is in fact self-deluded: God is never to be found in isolation but only in loving relationship.

Someone is unable to relate to his beloved, the world or God. By inclosing himself he proclaims his distrust for any relationship. He is "unable or unwilling to confide to anyone;" he

"need[s] no confidant;" it is "impossible for [him] to have a confidant." (SLW, 219, 374) But even Christ needed a confidant:

only one confidant, so to speak, who was somewhat able to follow him, a confidant who was sufficiently attentive and sleepless to make a search; it was the Law itself, which followed him step by step, hour by hour, with its infinite requirement (WL, 101)

Isolation and love are incompatible. "The one who loves is with blessed joy conscious of this and God is his confidant." (WL, 279) The lover must take God in her confidence because only in her indebtedness to Him may she love another properly.

It is God who, so to speak, lovingly assumes love's requirement; by loving someone, the lover incurs an infinite debt – but in turn to God as guardian for the beloved. (WL, 189)

Someone refuses the "third party" to enter his love relationship, yet this is exactly what *Works of Love* calls for. (SLW, 224) The third party needed between the lover and the beloved is God.

In conclusion, Quidam mistakenly believes that he must flee into isolation from what he believes to be the impossibility of love. *Works of Love*, however, emphasizes that true love cannot come about in isolation. It appreciates the hardships inherent in all love relations but maintains that one must open up to the beloved, the world and God.

The Merman

The Merman makes a brief appearance in "Problem III" of *Fear and Trembling*. The creature rises from the depths of his abode in the ocean and, as a habit, seduces young girls living by the shore. De Silentio introduces the creature to us at the moment of seduction: this time a girl named Agnes has fallen prey. Hypnotized, Agnes is prepared to follow him to the bottom of the ocean. But the Merman, for the first time in his life, is unable to complete the seduction. Kierkegaard beautifully describes the decisive moment – when faced with Agnes's innocence – the Merman is defeated:

He is already standing on the beach, crouching to dive out into the sea and plunge down with his booty — then Agnes looks at him once more, not fearfully, not despairingly, not proud of her good luck, not intoxicated with desire, but in absolute faith and in absolute humility, like the lowly flower she thought herself to be, and with this look she entrusts her whole destiny to him in absolute confidence. And look! The sea no longer roars, its wild voice is stilled; nature's passion, which is the merman's strength, forsakes him, and there is a deadly calm — and Agnes is still looking at him this way. Then the merman breaks down. He cannot withstand the power of innocence (FT, 94)

The seducer in the Merman is "crushed" by the gaze of the "utterly, utterly, utterly innocent" Agnes. (FT, 96, 95) The Merman takes her home, unable to disclose his true feelings, lies to her that he only wanted to show her the sea at calm, and leaves her. The real reason for his departure is that he is a monstrous creature and he knows it: "he cannot give himself faithfully to any girl, because he is indeed only a merman." (FT, 95) Agnes's faith and innocence crushingly juxtaposes with his faithlessness and the Merman cannot bear seeing himself in her light.

There are three possibilities open to the Merman. First, he may choose to remain in his "demonic element," that is, remain silent and "concealed" from Agnes, never admitting the reality

of his monstrous nature. (FT, 96) His goal would be to "save Agnes" from the suffering of loving him, but "[t]he merman is too sensible to reckon that a frank confession will arouse her loathing." So he would have to deceive her. Despite himself he would have to "belittle her, to ridicule her, to make her love ludicrous, and, if possible, to arouse her pride." (FT, 96) The Merman will greatly suffer if he follows the demonic trajectory. This possibility is the one actualized in Quidam's story. Someone, also a demonic lover, chooses to hide his feelings from Qaedam, to deceive her, and to leave her. Someone greatly suffers following the demonic trajectory.¹⁴

The two other possibilities both transcend the demonic element in the Merman by a movement of repentance. According to the second possibility "repentance alone gets him," according to the third "Agnes and repentance [both] get him." That is, the Merman may move to repent his monstrous nature and be alone or repent and be with his beloved. "He can hold himself back, remain in hiding," or "he can be saved by Agnes." (FT, 98)

It is only in the third possibility, if he goes back to Agnes, that he may leave behind hiddenness and become disclosed. Then "he is saved insofar as he becomes disclosed." (FT, 98) In section 2 I showed that salvation for Kierkegaard is only *in faith*. Therefore, the Merman may be saved *and* become disclosed only in faith. That faith is required for disclosure becomes even more explicit:

The merman, therefore, cannot belong to Agnes without, after having made the infinite movement of repentance, making one movement more: the movement by virtue of the absurd. (FT, 99)

¹⁴ Someone perhaps suffers less because in his mind Qaedam shares the blame for why their love relationship fails. Agnes, on the other hand, is perfectly innocent in the Merman's eyes. Full responsibility rests with the Merman for why he and Agnes fail to be together in love.

What is precisely required of the Merman to actualize the third possibility, to be together with Agnes, is the double movement of faith. In the movement of resignation he must renounce the finite and leave Agnes. In the movement of the absurd he must "take refuge in the paradox," that is, paradoxically believe, by virtue of the absurd, that the finite will be returned to him and he will receive Agnes back. (FT, 98) De Silentio leaves open all three possibilities of the Merman story.

Hall mistakenly understands the Merman to be necessarily unfaithful. On Hall's interpretation "we leave the merman in the sea, alone, reveling demonically in his own guilt. Incapable of repentance and disclosure, the merman's errors are formed in the context of unfaith." (Hall 2002, pp.77-78) Krishek accurately observes that this interpretation "disregards in particular the third, the most important and hopeful option which Johannes mentions with unmistakable amazement and envy – that the Merman will disclose himself to Agnes and live with her." (2009, p.137) Krishek rightly denies that the third option is sensible within a "context of unfaith." She and I agree that for the third option the Merman needs faith. However, she fails to grasp the ramifications of the fact that faith is necessary for the Merman and Agnes to be together in love. Krishek pushes a conclusion that points away from *Works of Love*. Discussing the Merman story she argues that *Works of Love* "present[s] only a partial view" and there is "the need to complete its vision by listening attentively to what Kierkegaard says in *Fear and Trembling*." (Krishek 2009, p.188) I argue that the Merman story points toward *Works of Love*; it anticipates and makes necessary a discussion of love in the context of faith.

The Merman story tells us that faith is necessary for lover and beloved to actualize their love relationship. But we learn from *Fear and Trembling* that faith is remarkably difficult to achieve:

no one has the right to lead others to believe that faith is something inferior or that it is an easy matter, since on the contrary it is the greatest and most difficult of all. (FT, 52)

Since true coming together of lover and beloved, that is, proper erotic love is only possible *in faith*, but faith is the most difficult thing to achieve, it follows that the third possibility of the Merman story is the most difficult to actualize. On Kierkegaard's view common people hardly ever achieve faith. Yet Krishek claims that the Merman is the "possible embodiment of every human lover," and "the common lover is in essence like the Merman" (2009, p.175) She claims that the common lover strives "towards the ideal of faith" and the ideal of the Merman of the third possibility, the faithful lover:

We can therefore conclude, by way of our reading of the Merman's love story, that although the striving for faith-full [sic] love is a difficult lifelong enterprise which requires tremendous and constant efforts, we may hope to look up to this model of romantic love as a possibility that is in principle open to us. (Krishek 2009, p.187)

I argue that Krishek's interpretation of the Merman story, contrary to her intention, amounts to the suggestion that faith is that which "requires tremendous and constant effort." For faith makes proper erotic love possible, not vice versa. Proper erotic love is faithful in the sense that it is within the context of faith (which is to say that, I argue, God is the middle term in the love relationship). The striving Kierkegaard describes is not for faithful love but for faith. Faithful love is the consequence of faith as it transforms the love relationship into proper erotic love. Krishek is mistaken about the object and goal of one's striving: the object is not love and the goal is not the

love relationship. Rather, the object of human striving, according to Kierkegaard, is faith and its goal is God.

In conclusion, my interpretation of the Merman story links it to *Works of Love*. I argue, contrary to Krishek, that the Merman's love story points toward *Works of Love* by asserting that faith is the main requirement of a proper erotic love relation. The upshot of the story is that we want to know what it is like to love in the context of faith. *Works of Love* is that text which teaches us about love in the context of faith. We need to look to *Works of Love* to find out about the nature of proper erotic love in the context of faith.

4. An optimistic reading of erotic love in *Works of Love*

Throughout *Works of Love* Kierkegaard starkly contrasts improper human love, improper self-love, improper erotic love and improper preferential love, on the one hand, with proper (Christian) love, on the other. Since all forms of improper love are forms of selfish self-love but Christian love is self-denial's love, the fundamental tension in *Works of Love* is between selfish self-love and self-denial's love. And the fundamental inconsistency is between self-denial's unselfishness and self-love's selfishness.

Self-denial's unselfish love

The relationship between self-denial and unselfishness is this: "unselfishness is one and the same as self-denial" or it is "an obvious consequence of self-denial." (WL, 366) Through self-denial and "self-sacrificing unselfishness" one makes oneself "nothing" both inward before God and outward before the world. (WL, 365) Furthermore, self-denial is defined as unselfish work for the good:

The Christian idea of self-denial is: give up your self-loving desires and cravings, give up your self-seeking plans and purposes so that you truly work unselfishly for the good¹⁵ (WL, 194)

¹⁵ Kierkegaard further illuminates the Christian idea of self-denial by contrasting it with our worldly conception of it: "*The merely human idea of self-denial* is this: give up your self-loving desires, cravings, and plans-then you will be esteemed and honored and loved as righteous and wise. It is easy to see that this self-denial does not attain to God or the relationship with God; it remains worldly within the relationship among human beings." (WL, 194)

Unselfish love does not seek worldly gains by performing works of love. It prefers to remain anonymous and hidden, but at the same time it opens up to world by helping people in it.

Self-love's selfishness

The greatest problem with self-love's selfishness is that it goes into hiding. It conceals self-love from the other person instead of sharing it by honestly opening up before her. (WL, 151) In erotic love a selfishly loving person only sees the beloved as the "other *I*":

Just as self-love selfishly embraces this one and only *self* that makes it self-love, so also erotic love's passionate preference selfishly encircles this one and only beloved . . . For this reason the beloved . . . [is] called, remarkably and profoundly, to be sure, the *other self*, the *other I* (WL, 53)

Selfish self-love resides in the *I*. The "*I* ignites itself by itself," it is "spontaneous combustion." (WL, 54) Erotic love is also spontaneous combustion, e.g., by way of "admiration." (WL, 54) The lover must admire the beloved:

Well, now, to admire another person is certainly not self-love; but to be loved by the one and only admired one, would not this relation turn back in a selfish way into the *I* who loves-his other *I*? (WL, 54)

Selfish self-love is about the ego, one's pride or self-esteem. Its prime manifestation is in the deluded domestic bliss:

To be married, to have children, to be a public official and have subordinates-in short, to have a lot of people sharing in one's life and giving it point is, of course, a heightening of self-esteem. People complain about being lonesome and therefore get married etc.-but is this love; I should say it is self-love. Most of what people of this kind say about believing in God and feeling God close to them is simply illusion, an intensified self-esteem and sense of vitality that they confuse with religiousness. (JP III 2412)

Kierkegaard laments that self-love and the self-love of erotic love are often mistaken for Christian love. (WL, 7, 53) Yet in fact, “it is Christianity’s intention to wrest self-love away from us human beings” (WL, 17) because self-love is “perilous” to neighbor-love. (WL, 20) Self-love “cannot endure” the love commandment’s “redoubling,” that is, the commandment to love the neighbor as yourself. (WL, 21)

Proper erotic love

While Christianity wrests selfish self-love from people, Kierkegaard maintains that it wants to teach “proper self-love.” (WL, 18) Christianity achieves the transformation of selfish self-love by requiring that the believer love the neighbor as herself. The duty to love is the duty to love every person as you love yourself. This duty is *only* understood in faith and this is why Kierkegaard calls selfish self-love “unfaithful self-love.” (WL, 55) He contrasts unfaithful self-love with “devoted self-love,” that is, proper self-love in the context of faith:

For the unfaithful self-love that wants to shirk, the task is: devote yourself; for the devoted self-love the task is: give up this devotion. (WL, 55)

The purpose of unfaithful self-love is to devote itself to the beloved; devoted self-love wants to get rid of this devotion. The purpose of devoted self-love is to devote itself to God. Devoted self-love properly commits to loving God first. Loving God first is the proper way of loving God. And to “love God is to love oneself truly.” (WL, 107) But to love God is Christian love, that is to say, self-denial’s love. Therefore, devoted self-love, or proper self-love mean the same thing: self-denial’s unselfish love.

Kierkegaard emphasizes that erotic love, as I have already shown, is a form of self-love. Erotic love may lead one into the “snare of self-love.” (WL, 61) Kierkegaard, on the surface, seems to suggest that erotic love is a form of selfish self-love. Erotic love is selfish when it loves the beloved as the ‘other *I*.’ But crucially, Kierkegaard maintains that selfish self-love might be transformed into unselfish self-love by Christian love. Erotic love is self-love; therefore, it seems to follow that erotic love’s selfishness might also be transformed into unselfishness by Christian love. Indeed, I argue, this transformed erotic love is what Kierkegaard means by placing God as the middle term between lover and beloved. Kierkegaard is clear about that God is the middle term in proper erotic love between wife and husband. Their love may not have begun by accepting God as the middle term and in this sense it may have been initially improper erotic love amounting to unfaithful self-love. But faith is always a possibility in human life. By a leap of faith and by the strength of the absurd improper erotic love may be transformed into proper erotic love; selfishness might be taken away from erotic love and replaced by self-denial’s unselfishness. Erotic love thus abides between lover and beloved through unselfish Christian love, through loving God first.

Erotic love thus abides when God is the middle term in the love relationship. More accurately, erotic love is of the proper kind if and only if God is the middle term in the love relationship.

5. When God is the middle term

In this section I give a detailed exposition of the idea which I find key to interpreting erotic love in *Works of Love*, namely, that God should be the middle term in a true love relationship, including erotic love.

God the middle term and Faith

In *Works of Love* Kierkegaard again and again stresses that in a love relationship God must be the middle term. As I have argued before all works published before *Works of Love* that are concerned with erotic love depict the views and lives of characters who fail at love because of their lack of faith. For God to be the middle term in the love relation the lovers must have faith. Erotic love lived in the context of faith is a trinity between lover, God and beloved. Faithful love starkly contrasts with our ordinary conception of love:

Worldly wisdom is of the opinion that love is a relationship between persons; Christianity teaches that love is a relationship between: a person–God–a person, that is, that God is the middle term. (WL, 106-7)

The triadic relationship is unlike a human love triangle. The "unfaithful person" will "jilt the beloved" should you "place as the middle term between the lover and the beloved the neighbor." (WL, 54) Faith is required for holding on to the beloved and, at the same time, to accept that in a person to person love relationship the neighbor (God) must be the middle term.

Kierkegaard makes two theological assumptions. First, in faith God reveals Himself as Love: God is Love. Second, in faith we accept that we belong to God. Jamie Ferreira argues that from the two theological assumptions it follows that the love of one, who belongs to God, for another, who similarly and equally belongs to God, may only come about by way of God as the middle term. (2001, p.72) In the context of faith, therefore, God must be the middle term between lover and beloved.

Kierkegaard virtually interchangeably uses God and neighbor as the middle term. The neighbor is the middle term between lover and beloved when the lover loves the beloved not only *qua* beloved but also as her neighbor. But "in love for the neighbor, God is the middle term." (WL, 58) With regards to the husband's love for his wife, for example, "it is God who by himself and by means of the middle term 'neighbor' checks on whether the love for wife [is conscientious]" (WL, 142)

What is the third party in a relationship?

What does it mean that God is the middle term in the love relationship? Kierkegaard anticipates some misunderstandings about this:

What, indeed, does it mean that this third is present? Does it mean that you cannot love if [sic] if now this or that is not according to your wishes? Does the third party therefore mean disunion, separation, so that as a consequence the thought of separation takes part – . . . Does this third party mean that in a certain sense the love-relationship is no relationship at all, that you stand above the relationship and test the beloved? In that case, do you consider that something else is being tested, whether you actually do have love or, more

accurately, that something else is decided, that you actually do not have love? (WL, 165-6)

Kierkegaard goes on to say that the one who charges the idea that God is the middle term in the love relationship with charges of disunion and lovelessness is like "the fastidious person who rejects all food" or

the one who does eat the food graciously offered him and yet in a sense does not eat it but continually only samples the food as if he had eaten his fill or makes an effort to taste a more delectable dish but is sated by the simpler food. (WL, 166)

According to the charge of disunion if God is the middle term the beloved is not loved directly by the lover. According to the charge of lovelessness if God is the middle term the lover's love for her beloved is insubstantial, without content. Kierkegaard rejects both of these allegations.¹⁶

Kierkegaard offers two related answers as to what it means exactly to say that God is the middle term in a love relationship. First, he argues that God is the middle term in any love relationship when the lovers realize that they belong to God:

When, however, God is the middle term in judging love . . . The judgment is this: is it actually love, in the divine sense, to show a devotion such as the object of love demanded? Next, is it love, in the divine sense, on the part of the object of love to demand such devotion? Every person is God's bond servant; therefore he dare not belong to anyone in

¹⁶ For an elaboration of these allegations, see Logstrup (1997). For a reply, see Ferreira (2001) pp.76-83

love unless in the same love he belongs to God and dare not possess anyone in love unless the other and he himself belong to God in this love (WL, 107-8)

To belong to God means to belong "to God in every thought, the most hidden; in every feeling, the most secret; in every movement, the most inward." (WL, 115) However, the fact that we are completely dependent creatures of the one Creator is the truth about the human condition that the majority of people are not ready to accept. Kierkegaard says that it is "small-mindedness" when the creature "creates itself and also distorts God"; not accepting the Creator, the creature is her "own miserable invention." (WL, 271) Such a creature suffers from the illusion that she is an independent being, that she does not belong to God. She lacks honesty and earnestness. This leads to Kierkegaard's second answer.

He writes that being mindful about the fact that God is the middle term in the love relation means to "root out all equivocation and fastidiousness" and to love "in earnestness." (WL, 166)

Loving in earnestness

consists precisely in this, that the relationship itself will with integrated power fight against the imperfection, overcome the defect, and remove the heterogeneity. (WL, 166)

First, earnestness is the weapon against the imperfection of the love relation, not deception, the tool of failed lovers. Second, defect is in human nature and only by repenting in earnestness may we overcome it. Third, heterogeneity is deception; we must remove it by way of earnestness and see that truth is equality. The meaning of that God is the middle term between lover and beloved is this then: "to love each other in sincere faith" with "honesty before God . . . present in each individual." (WL, 151)

Can erotic love be eternal?

Eternal love is the only kind of proper love according to Kierkegaard.

Love in the sense of the moment or of the momentary is simply neither more nor less than self-love. Thus it is self-loving to speak that way about love, and it is self-loving to win that approval. True love is self-denial's love. But what is self-denial? It is giving up the moment and the momentary. (WL, 369)

If erotic love can be broken so that it does not abide then it is not eternal and therefore it cannot be true love. This is the case when God is not the middle term in the love relationship. But the contrary is true when God is in fact the middle term:

When a relationship is only between two, each one always has the upper hand in the relationship by being able to break it . . . But when there are three, no one of them can do it. The third, as stated, is *love* itself, to which the innocent sufferer in the break can then hold – then the break has no power over him. (WL, 304-5)

It is to say that when God is the middle term in the relationship ("love itself" is God) the breaking of the couple is not the end of love. That is to say, love's abiding does not preclude the breaking of the couple. However, one's rejection of the relationship is not an act of rejection of love because the love is a trinity that abides. The fact that erotic love may abide through the God relation is important because it explains how erotic love can be eternal.

Proper erotic love is eternal by way of God as the middle term. I argue that assertions that are seemingly contradictory to erotic love's eternality, e.g., "[e]rotic love is still not the eternal; it is the beautiful dizziness of infinity," are about erotic love that has not undergone the transformation of Christian love through self-denial. (WL, 19) Our ordinary concept of love is so entrenched that we cannot make out even if this transformation has taken place.

Earthly understanding does not perceive that love is by no means a separate third thing but is the middle term: without love, no hope for oneself; with love, hope for all other . . . [T]he one who loves . . . learned this from eternity, but only because he was the loving one could he learn from eternity, and only because he was the loving one could he learn this from eternity. (WL, 260)

When God is the middle term in the relationship love is the middle term since God is love. The lover only learns this from eternity because she is the loving one. Therefore, her love must be eternal. That is to say, when God is the middle term in the relationship love must be eternal. Therefore, love abides even if the couple breaks the relationship. Love's abiding is a genuine work of love:

Thus when with regards to human love we say that love abides, it is readily apparent that this is a work or that it is not an inactive characteristic that love has as such, but a characteristic that acquired at every moment, and also, at every moment it is acquired, is an active work. The one who loves abides, he abides in love, preserves himself in love; what he accomplishes by this is that his love for people abides. He becomes the one who loves by abiding in love; by abiding in love his love abides (WL, 301-2)

In conclusion, proper erotic love does not entail that the faithful couple must be together forever. What is eternal is their love for one another through God as the middle term.

Can preferential erotic love be non-preferential?

It is very clear in Kierkegaard that if one is to love properly, one must love everyone equally since all human beings are equal before God, and therefore equally worthy of love. (WL 19, 44, 55, 58, 63) But he also maintains that we must love preferentially as well since erotic love is the “joy of life,” and “life’s most beautiful happiness.” (WL, 150, 267) He explicitly claims that the non-preferential love of the neighbor is not to replace or eliminate preferential love:

Take away the distinction of preferential love so that you can love the neighbor. But you are not to cease loving the beloved because of this – far from it. If in order to love the neighbor you would have to begin by giving up loving those for whom you have preference, the word "neighbor" would be the greatest deception ever contrived. Moreover, it would even be a contradiction, since inasmuch as the neighbor is all people surely no one can be excluded – should we now say, least of all the beloved? (WL, 61)

Kierkegaard refuses to elevate equal neighborly love above preferential erotic love because in this case the love of the neighbor would be preferred to the love of the beloved, that is to say, the love of the neighbor would be preferential. But the love of the neighbor is by definition equal, i.e., non-preferential. This seemingly irreconcilable tension that amounts to a contradiction between assertions about preferential and non-preferential love and overall inconsistency in *Works of Love*

has generated expansive secondary literature trying to solve the problem.¹⁷ I will look at a few of these and will make my own contribution based on Krishek.

Antony Aumann offers an Aristotelian golden mean solution. He argues that Kierkegaard's strategy is "corrective": it is designed to move people away from extreme self-love and get them in the correct middle between self-love and neighborly love by emphasizing the demand of equality. (2013, p.212) Since preferential love amounts to self-love and non-preferential love to neighborly love, it follows that Aumann's solution is to say no more than that one must love preferentially as well as non-preferentially. In my opinion this is not much of a solution to the philosophically important problem of contradictory demands

Ferreira (2001) asserts that first and foremost we must love the neighbor and if we love the beloved as the neighbor, i.e., equally to anyone else, then we may love her also preferentially. Krishek (2008) correctly observes that Ferreira's analysis (just like Aumann's) offers no resolution to the contradiction that it sets out to resolve.

Krishek's own solution is to "differ from" and "amend" Kierkegaard's concept of true love in *Works of Love*. (2008, p.612) She suggests that we should not understand true Christian love as self-denial's love, but rather as love "structured in the shape of self-denial (resignation) and unqualified self-affirmation (repetition) tied paradoxically together." (Krishek 2008, p.615) Krishek's solution thus is that in true love one must love paradoxically; that is, to love preferentially and non-preferentially the same object, at the same time is not only a possibility in true love, but rather a requirement. I agree with Krishek that faith-based love is such that it accommodates the paradoxical tension between contradictory demands, but I disagree that we need to generate a new concept of true love. Krishek amends the concept of true love so that in her

¹⁷ See Antony Aumann (2013); Joseph Carlsmith (2011); Jaime Ferreira (2001) pp. 43-52 and Ferreira (2008); Sharon Krishek (2008, 2009) Chapter 4; Sylvia Walsh (1988)

treatment it becomes a paradox. However, this is to assume that true love in Kierkegaard is not a paradox to begin with. But in fact true love is a paradox in *Works of Love*. True love is both self-love and self-denial's love; it is both preferential and non-preferential love; it is both direct and indirect love. True love is when God is the middle term in the love relationship. But God as the middle term is paradoxical because, on the one hand, the lover must love God first and love the beloved only through God, that is, indirectly and, on the other hand, Kierkegaard claims that it is a mistake to believe that the beloved is thus loved indirectly, that there is "disunion" between lover and beloved. (WL, 165) I am sympathetic to this faith-based solution to the philosophical problem at hand, but it obviously relies on an incoherency. But if we accept with Kierkegaard that faith must be a paradoxical leap by virtue of the absurd and love is a consequence of faith, that is, proper love may only come about in faith, then we might be right about interpreting the contradiction arising in Kierkegaard's treatment of love by relying on the paradox of faith.

There is another convincing view that presents a coherent solution to this issue, that is, it does not rely on accepting contradictions. It is Gene Outka's general treatment of the love commandment that is considered the standard solution to the philosophical tension in *Works of Love*. (Aumann 2013, p.205) He argues that regard and treatment are distinct: equal regard does not entail equal treatment. (Outka 1972, p.10, 19-21, 269) The love commandment asks that we regard every human being equally, that is, we must be concerned about their well-being for their own sake and not for self-interested ulterior motives. Equal treatment, however, would mean acting equally with respect to every person. This is not what the love commandment asks of us. In preferential erotic love, therefore, the lover may treat the beloved differently from anyone else without transgressing the commandment of equal regard. This view presents an alternative to the view that I am sympathetic to and it is important because even if one limits one's willingness to

accept contradictions only in case of faith, because one believes that it is only the leap of faith that requires acceptance of paradoxes, one still has a solution to the philosophical issue at hand that presents a coherent view.

In conclusion, whether faith-based or non-faith based, there is a solution to the seeming contradictions in *Works of Love* that arise between preferential and non-preferential love. This is important because thus we can complete the coherent reading of *Works of Love* that this paper intends to put forward. My interpretation must accept only one contradiction or inconsistency which is the paradox of faith. The leap of faith by virtue of the absurd is Kierkegaard's central tenet in *Works of Love* which is assumed just like he assumes that God is love. If ordinary people who read Kierkegaard accept these two assumptions they might more fully appreciate Kierkegaard's argument about true love.

Conclusion

When God is the middle term in the love relation one loves in faith. But what is the basis of our choice of a partner if our faith-based love is non-preferential, i.e., not based on the properties of the beloved but on God? It seems to be the case that if we completely abstract from the properties of the beloved there is no basis of choice. Although Kierkegaard is silent on the issue, it seems to me consistent with Kierkegaard's positive view of erotic to say that erotic love does not begin with being mindful about God as the middle term. Erotic love might initially be based on the properties of the beloved. When one chooses a partner one does it on the basis of the beloved, but the love is sustained not on the basis of those properties but on the basis of God. The beloved's properties are relevant to choice but not to the sustaining of the love. In my opinion this view would be acceptable to many religious people, including deeply Christian believers.

Kierkegaard's view of erotic love is very demanding. It is understandable that many people refuse to appreciate it. But I hope that my short introduction to and analysis of the various relevant texts will make his view more palatable to more people. I only offer here my interpretation and my argument, but hopefully this paper will be a good Kierkegaardian gadfly and will buzz the readers into thinking more deeply about what it is to truly love. For the goal of this paper is to learn more about true love from Kierkegaard even if the reader finds my interpretation objectionable or my analysis lacking. What I take to be an advantage of my paper is its positive conclusion: erotic love is indeed within our grasp, we just need to reach out, we just need to make the necessary effort to get it. Kierkegaard teaches us that faith is always at issue in true love. In my opinion religious people and Christian believers in particular should attentively listen to Kierkegaard. I also believe, or rather hope that non-religious people will take away some useful insights from my paper as well.

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