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Augustinian Influences on Thomas of England: Love, Reason and the Unruly Will in *Tristan*

Charlene Recio, '02
Illinois Wesleyan University

Dan Terkla, Faculty Advisor
Illinois Wesleyan University

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Oral Presentation O2.2

AUGUSTINIAN INFLUENCES ON THOMAS OF ENGLAND: LOVE, REASON,
AND THE UNRULY WILL IN *TRISTRAN*

Charlene Recio and Dan Terkla*

Department of English, Illinois Wesleyan University

Much discussion has taken place as to whether or not Thomas of England intended *Tristan* to be a public condemnation of adulterous relationships; the main piece of evidence specifically refers to the tragic ending of this romance and the death of the two lovers. However, to convict Tristan and Queen Ysolt for their love would imply that the two had control over this love; the love potion shared between them serves as a symbol for the lack of control they had over falling in love with each other. Rather than place blame on these two lovers, this study, through an exploration of 12th century perspectives on love, reason, and the unruly will, discards the notion of their choice to love and, instead, will focus on the inevitability of the lovers' tragic ending.

Although this study acknowledges the traditional battle between Love and Reason, I will also attempt to make the distinction between Love and lust. In *Tristan*, Thomas takes note of lust and bodily desire, only to show its relative unimportance in the story in comparison to the roles played by Love and Reason; bodily desire is usually associated with earthly dimensions, while Love and Reason take on a higher role that transcends any intrusion by lust. Although Tristan and Ysolt are, indeed, physically attracted to each other, their desire can be more accurately defined as love, rather than lust. Thus, the two are doomed to begin with, for desire can never be satisfied; desire feeds upon desire – to satisfy desire would be to end it.

Finally, this study will incorporate the unusual nature of Tristan's will, which is in concordance with itself. Unlike most human will, which is unruly in its nature, Tristan's will is at peace with itself; his reason (his mind) coincides with his love (his heart). In fact, some critics argue that Tristan's Love overpowers his Reason. For this reason, Tristan and Ysolt - who do not follow the conventional rules of society in which Reason is usually the victor over Love - are doomed to suffer, and inevitably, die in the name of Love.