***Literature and Data***

*Presentation Preparation Example*

Chad Wellmon, “Sacred Reading”

Argument

The critique of distant reading that it is overly "scientific" is not new but one that has haunted academic literary study for at least the past two centuries. The sorting of textual variants in nineteenth-century philology and purportedly objective interpretations of twentieth-century New Criticism were each criticized for their privileging of the technical over the subjective. Instead, these criticisms would seek to recover the potential of the text to transform its reader.

Although the means and goal of that hoped-after transformation have changed over time – especially with the rise of Humanism in Europe – its intellectual precedent is found in Augustine's account of his conversion in the *Confessions*. Contact with the text brings its reader into contact with something beyond it, the divine.

Today's distant reading, then, is continuous with recent literary study in its emphasis on technique and methods, yet it reimagines Augustine's own goals for reading since it looks for meaning beyond bounds of the individual text.

Structure

Wellmon supports his claims by offering a broad history of reading practices and the assumptions they make about literary texts. He begins by emphasizing the prominent role of Christian and pagan classical texts in Augustine of Hippo's account of his conversion. Wellmon then traces Augustine's reading methods through medieval pedagogical texts and modern scholarly ones.

Themes & Other Problems Raised

The Literary Canon

Classical, Medieval, and Modern Eras

Wonder as essential yet mobile element of reading

Computers are ruining the humanities

Questions

What is distant reading?

What were Augustine’s methods and goals for reading?

What is the "technique" of New Criticism?

What does Humanism refer to?

Are computers ruining literature?