Christopher Richmann: Welcome to Professors Talk Pedagogy, a podcast from the Academy for Teaching and Learning at Baylor University. I'm your host, Christopher Richmann. Professors Talk Pedagogy presents discussions with great professors about pedagogy, curriculum and learning in order to propel the virtuous cycle of teaching. As we frankly and critically investigate our teaching, we open new lines of inquiry. We engage in conversation with colleagues, and we attune to students' experiences, all of which not only improves our teaching, but enriches and motivates ongoing investigation. And so the cycle continues.

Today, our guest is Dr. Sarah Jane Murray, professor of Great Texts and Creative Writing at Baylor University. Dr. Murray is a scholar of medieval and Renaissance texts. In addition to her doctorate in Romance languages and Literatures from Princeton, Sarah Jane completed a professional program in screenwriting at UCLA. Heavily involved in digital humanities and storytelling projects, she is an Emmy-nominated writer and producer who also teaches Screenwriting and documentary filmmaking in Baylor's Department of Film and Digital Media. Her body of collaborative work has played at major international film festivals and has been distributed by PBS, Link TV, Amazon and Netflix. At present, she is in post-production on her feature-length directorial debut. Sarah Jane's writing, producing, and directing for short formats has also been recognized with over 20 international creative awards. Most recently, Sarah Jane's quest to break down barriers to access to engaging with the Great texts, while inspiring awe, wonder, and critical thinking, led to the founding of her edumedia project, "The Greats Story Lab." We are delighted to have Dr. Murray on the show to discuss the well-formed rather than the well-filled mind in film and education, and why we need stories.

Sarah Jane Murray, thank you so much for joining the show today.

Sarah Jane Murray: Thank you for having me.

CR: Your friends and your many, many followers on social media call you SJ? Can I call you SJ?

SJM: Please do. Yes.

CR: Alright, a little intimacy here in our conversation, as well. You're a great colleague to have here at Baylor University, and you teach such a range of courses, you know, all the way from the ancient texts that you do, you know, with our honors program here into the film and digital media space. So, do you feel like there's something that threads through all of those teaching experiences, or from the students' perspective, the learning experiences?

SJM: Absolutely. And I think, to be clear, I wasn't aware of this when I went out on the sort of limbs or leaps of faith of exploring these different spaces, but they were all driven by this desire to understand how story operates as a learning technology, as a communication technology. The reality is, to me, all the courses are the same. They're about story and how story invites us into what we often call transformational play, which is a big word for saying, I come into the experience with one set of constructs, and I leave it with another. And this doesn't have to be a

radical change. It's an invitation into being willing to take a step outside what I know when I begin, in order to go to an interesting place and go to an adventure. And who doesn't want that?

CR: Yeah. So what does that look like in a course on ancient or medieval culture or texts as you are teaching those?

SJM: You know, sometimes today, I think we look back and think of these as things that are from very old, from a long time ago. How can this be related to my favorite Netflix show today? But at the time, these were at the forefront of not only entertainment but education. You know, this idea of education is the educare, the leading me out, moving from a place of darkness towards the light. When you think about Greek classical tragedy, they developed a whole set of technologies in order for people to be able to participate in them better, like the mask that helped people project their voice, but also showcased, from far away, emotions. I think for a very long time, probably since humans arrived on this planet, we have been thinking about how to use stories, not just for entertainment, as we think about them today, but for what I'd call moral and character formation. So how do I decide and think through this idea of right versus wrong? How do I become a better person, rather than somebody telling me what that looks like. How do I experience it? Well, there's no better way than to journey with people who are good people, but it's also really good to see stories and be like, 'I don't want to be like MacBeth'. Or 'I don't want to be like Walter White'. Shakespeare and television are not as divorced as we might first think.

CR: Yeah. I love that you came out of the gate using this word 'play', when I asked you about teaching and learning. I wonder how you balance that or weave it into sort of the necessary structures of higher education, you know, the syllabus and assignments and grades and learning objectives. How do you get the play to happen in that context?

SJM: What a great question. Okay, so the reality is, I kind of decided when I started, I'd say I had a very traditional syllabus. And I've taken some risks over the years. I think that you learned by taking risks. In a sense, maybe I'm an academic entrepreneur or a thought entrepreneur in that way. I realized very quickly that it's hard for a student to feel a sense of play when they have laid out for them everything we're going to do this term in a document that functions as a contract. But they also need the safe space of knowing what the expectations are going to be, what the grading structure looks like. What that's evolved for me to become over the years is I give students at the beginning of term what I call a skeletal syllabus. It's an invitation into what our journey and experience will look like in the class. It has a clear sense of what the assignments will be, but at the end of the day, it's going to grow and evolve in ways that I can't even anticipate based on the students' needs. So perhaps we'll be reading the *Odyssey,* or if we're in a film class, maybe we're studying an extraordinary movie, and a conversation comes up, and we realize, 'oh, we'd really like to mine this.' We have room in the growth of this skeletal syllabus to say, 'you know what? Let's take next Wednesday and talk about that.' And that makes us feel like we're in a real live conversation that's framed with outcomes but not shackled to my expectations in the present of what the mysterious future may hold.

CR: Yeah. Very well said. Listeners on our podcast will have heard me say some version of this in the past, which is, I think it's a little bit hubristic almost for the instructor to say, 'Here we go. I don't know you, barely. You don't know me, but I can tell exactly where we're going to be in 16

weeks. I can pinpoint exactly what's going to happen on each day we meet.' You know, aside from the hubris involved in that, it closes things down, right? And so as important as learning objectives are, we have to figure out some way to allow for some porousness, right? Or some flexing that happens along those edges.

SJM: Absolutely. When we play God, we remove all opportunity for magic and for us to be invited. I mean, if we really believe in a student-centered learning experience, right? And in this idea that we're engaging in a place of play. We're engaging in this place of -we're engaging in this place of play, and we're all going to grow together, then it's not only hubristic but ignorant to imagine that I can anticipate all the pivots and twists and turns that will happen. So how does this practically play out? How might you implement this even in a class when you want to or have to or are required to keep a formal syllabus structure? Um, it can be as simple as not giving the syllabus out on the first day of class, having everybody in, setting expectations together. What do the students hope to grow through in this class? What are some of their goals? Learning goals? No, 'I need to fulfill this credit.' By getting them involved in that conversation and bringing the syllabus to class the next time, while incorporating some other feedback, It signals: this is a journey we're going on together, and your input matters.

CR: Right. Right. There are some developing ways, too, that instructors have created syllabi that have room for the unknown. I'm thinking about - I think his name is Robert Talbert. He has this idea of what he calls the 12-weeks syllabus. So most of us, you know, in our semesters, we have, like, a 15-week of what we're actually meeting with students. And so he intentionally has, like, three weeks that are not planned. I think mostly he does that because he wants to use that for review and cumulative learning. But I could see you could also do that where the blank weeks are interspersed, so at many stages throughout the semester, you've got time to breathe and time to spend or linger or wonder together, right?

SJM: That's exactly right. That's exactly what I do, in fact, and we do it several times throughout the semester, and we call them, just to have a placeholder in the syllabus, roundtable discussions.

CR: Okay, great.

SJM: This is an open class day, and I might propose a topic, or we might put a pin in something and bring it back. Students might say, 'Hey, can we have a conversation about how modernity is pushing us to not create space for moral and character formation?' I'll say, 'Absolutely.' Then since it's a roundtable discussion, everybody has to bring something to the roundtable. It's a wonderful moment of relaxation from the grind. How can I teach a filmmaker to be an artist who responds to the world around them? How can I teach and guide a student who's seeking to understand the great books to go out into the world and implement what they're learning by testing out these different scenarios into their own lives without actually modeling that moment of transformation and activation in the classroom? So it can seem like we're losing time for readings.

CR: Right.

SJM: But we're not. We're gaining time for learning.

CR: Yeah. Mm. That's right. So you use film in your courses, and I know this firsthand because I've had the pleasure of actually sitting and observing in one of your courses. You are a filmmaker yourself, and you teach aspects of film. What is the role of film in your teaching? Is this part of, like, a larger multimedia strategy for, you know, just kind of hitting students in many different ways with many different media, or is there something particular about film that you think, as a teaching tool, really works well?

SJM: This is really important, I think. When it started out, I wanted to explore, what does it look like to create soundscapes for class? It was as simple as playing a tune while people were coming into class and setting the tone. I taught foreign language for many years, and I played around with the idea of, well, why can't we learn the structures of a foreign language and new vocabulary by doing karaoke in class?

CR: Right.

SJM: I was a new assistant professor at the time, and actually, one day-fun story-my students were being particularly boisterous and singing very loudly, just the way I wanted them to, and a senior faculty member in the building who didn't know we were doing this came in and said, ‘What is going on in this classroom? Where is the professor?’ ‘Sorry, it's me.’ But it was really cool because it was as simple for those students as creating little blankety blanks where they'd have to listen and fill in words and then learn them and have vocab class tests. And then they got to this point where they realized that a lot of linguistic structure can be communicated through learning songs. And there's a lot of research about this. So I started reading it, and I started thinking, hmm, you know, wait a minute. Stories, whether they're in books - which can be harder for students to understand in the digital age when they spend so much time online and consuming media - but also stories in digital formats can activate our brains in a way that makes the content sticky.

I'm thinking of research, a popular book like Dan and Chip Heath’s, who wrote about the power of moments. Allegedly, when we reached the end of our lives, we can remember at most 30 sticky moments in our lives. My wish for everybody listening in is don't live your life like that. Create lots of sticky moments. How do we do that for a student? Well, Uri Hassen did a lot of foundational research in Europe, also over at Princeton, and there's been work at the Emory Story Lab and at the Stanford Story Lab on how stories activate our brains. And there's sort of passive media consumption. That's not what we're talking about here. We're talking about inviting people into a specific format that activates our neural pathways. So it can be as simple as - you can experience it right now. If you're a coffee drinker, and you hear me say coffee, and I say it again, coffee. And you're starting to feel a little bit more awake. That's because research shows that hearing the word ‘coffee,’ when you're a coffee drinker, activates that memory and helps wake you up. So you don't have to drink five cups of coffee a day. You can just tell yourself you're drinking it.

CR: But by saying that, you also make me want to drink coffee.

SJM: I bet. I bet. I bet. So this is what's happening when we revisit materials in multimedia formats. We're activating neural pathways. Now, I have a tendency to think of these two things in opposition, I think, in the humanities, especially. If I'm watching film content, then I'm replacing the book. But that's not what's really happening. What if a one-minute or a five-minute or a ten-minute film becomes an invitation to frame my enthusiasm and to activate my neural pathways through a meaningful play so that I can go read the book and understand it better? That's what we're looking to do. Sometimes it's the sensory experience.

CR: Great.

SJM: But that led me, in partnership with the Academy for Teaching and Learning, of course, as you know, starting a couple of years ago and over this last year, to create content targeted at studying what kind of film material activates that learning engagement.

CR: Yeah. So I've seen you use that in course, or you've used kind of Beta versions of that in your courses, and you have surveyed the students, interviewed them, gotten their feedback. What are they saying about the use of those kinds of short-edged media-type films in class?

SJM: Oh, thanks for… Yeah, we came up with that word because we were like, 'It's not educational media, and it's not media. We'll call it edumedia,' which was important to us to say that this is something different, and we're experimenting with it as a format. And we want to invite anybody else who wants to experiment with us to learn best practices. Everything's open source in this project so that we can share and learn together. It has been so just enriching and life-giving to get the student feedback. You know, in studies that have been done today on the use of film in classrooms, there's a really good reason to be cautious. We see things like reported 95% student disengagement, reaching for phones, not taking notes, multitasking. We were shocked in the first round of collections we did to, in some groups, experience 100% disengagement. Even in self-reported use at home, we're looking at things like 76 to 80% of self [inaudible]. That's a huge difference from 5%.

CR: Oh, yes.

SJM: So that convinces me that there's something here. Now, the anecdotal feedback that we get is even better. I mean, I've had students tell me, 'You know, I've been discouraged to read this hard old book before. But I read the video, and I think, I can do this.' And that's really great because it leads to flipped classroom models, where I can give them that content outside of class, and we can benefit and really harness the power of the group when we come to class.

CR: I'm definitely going to link your website in our show notes, but can you give us a sense of what those videos are? They're usually 10 minutes or less, right? And so what exactly is happening that allows that to be the primer for the more intense reading and discussion?

SJM: This is a great question. And this is why, again, being open source is so important because if we were a for-profit enterprise, we'd say, 'well, that's our secret sauce.' I can tell you. So we're leaning into my co-founder for this nonprofit initiative that we've created as a parallel initiative, and she's now the executive director of that space, the Great Story Lab. Has a background not

only in great books and screenwriting but in neuroscience. And we're really leaning into thinking about the tripartite structure- the old three-act structure that Aristotle wrote about himself. He got a lot of things right before we even had a lot of the technologies he was envisioning- that activates our brains. The idea is, we have to pose a question, bring an invitation, set the tone for what we're going to worry about. It's not just an entertainment hook. It's a question that is going to help me transform my way of looking at the world. Then we'll go into the text a little bit or the topic, and we'll say, 'Well, here's what this author is telling us. This is a great thought.' Now, in part three, 'how does that apply to my own life, and how can I go activate that in my own life?' And we plan on rolling this out across multiple formats. So we started with these ten-minute videos to twelve- minute videos, inspired in part by research that TED did and was inspired by on 18 minutes really being the limit for cognitive overload for a talk. So we thought, well, 12 - we're going to aim more for that. And then we realized we get much more engagement on six to seven. Then one of our advisors, who works primarily in marketing, said, 'You know, you really need to roll out one-minute videos to give people a sense of why they want more of this.' So we have started a one-minute reel series called 'Great Thoughts.'

CR: I saw this in your most recent documents- the 59-second video.

SJM: That's what YouTube Shorts requires. And it's really quite wonderful because, through these various formats, we've been able, in our first six months of formation as a nonprofit, and in our first year of thinking through these in an academic way and with ATL and the study, we've been able to engage users in 36 countries. We could never have planned for that. But that tells us we need to do more, and we also need to translate it into other languages so that we can engage people in their native tongues as well. So we're going to create an open-source translation project to invite other scholars to collaborate with us on that.

CR: Let's swing the pendulum the other way. We know that our brains are what they are, and our cultural context is what it is- that a 59-second video is going to do some work that other longer forms are not going to do. And yet, as a literature professor, as a professor of teaching great texts, you need students to sit with the texts, to spend time with them, to learn patient reading, generous reading, and slow reading, right? And I know you do this in your courses and you do it outside of your courses with student groups as well. How do you get students to develop those- I would call them virtues-those academic virtues of patience, and really, it's humility, giving yourself over to the author, to the text? Where do you start with that? Is it just slowly building, or is there some kind of 'aha' moment for students and for you as an instructor?

SJM: I set up-well, it hasn't been like this- but now I set up that contract in that first day of class. And I say, 'Look, there's not going to be busy work in this class, but it'll come back real fast if you don't do the readings. I need you to think long and hard if you're willing to opt in to do the readings for this class, I will commit to making sure the readings are not too long, but we are going to read complete books.' And we have an open discussion about that and why it's important, and we use the words you just used. This isn't just a cultivation of virtues in the academic sense. This is a cultivation and pursuit of virtue for how we live our lives. And I think science helps us here, and I do share this kind of data point with my students. There have been lots of studies on reading. Yet, I think very recently, we're seeing in the news this idea that National Associations are recommending, 'Well, students don't like to have to read books, so

let's just give them short readings.' Have they read the research that says that lifelong learners can expect a 20% longer lifespan than people who do not read books- lifelong learners specifically who are reading books? You can go look the study up. I can give you some links as well. That's significant. Why is that? Well, linked to reading through a book- it doesn't have to be speed reading; it can be done slowly. As you said, I'm a big advocate for slow reading. There's also other things like blood pressure drops. Studies show up to a 68% drop in blood pressure. I mean, is it worth experimenting with reading instead of just turning to pharmaceuticals for our blood pressure and our stressful lives? I think so. Why don't we hear about this? Is it really a coincidence?

CR: I'm hoping a doctor someday prescribes…

SJM: Me too.

CR: …prescribes, 'Here's the Iliad.'

SJM: Yeah, and to be clear, I don't want anybody listening to this to not take their blood pressure medication. Please take it. I just want folks to know that there are actual physical benefits. And then loneliness—like, you know, our brain patterns tap into being part of a community of readers. And we know the Office of the Surgeon General is not pushing this information in the United States, but it's been around for a long time that feeling lonely—the loneliness crisis, especially for people as we age—has an impact on our health that's equivalent to smoking multiple packs of cigarettes a day. So we talk about this with my students, and I say, this is an investment in your future, but those are just all scientifically proven things, the benefits of reading. Now, let's talk about your souls, your minds, finding a way to make these authors your thought partners. And invariably, every semester, because we do read slower, and because I do teach younger students, multiple students come to tell me, 'You know, in high school, I didn't read the books, but I want you to know that this is the first class I read all the books in.' So I know it works.

CR: That's fantastic. Well, would you like to weigh in at all- there's a lot of conversation in higher ed right now, especially in the last five years. Of course, the pandemic is a big part of this conversation—that students' reading abilities and their skills in reading have dropped considerably in the last few years. Do you sense that, or do you think it's a little 'the sky is falling' kind of rhetoric?

SJM: You know, it's maybe a little bit of both, right? On one hand, I'm not even entirely convinced that it's the pandemic that did this. I think we were already on a trajectory for a drop in attention span and digital distraction. This is why YouTube and reels from- Facebook place a 59-second or 1-minute limit on reels. These are for-profit companies, and they have to answer to their stakeholders. The reality is that people's attention span is cutting off at 59 seconds these days. They're going to make more money, get more eyeballs, and fulfill their goal as an enterprise when people generate content that's that short. The problem is that it is cultivating and nurturing our attention deficit, which is why we're not going all in with 1-minute teasers and invitations, and we're also asking people to sit without attention-driving techniques like big letters on the screen or jazzy voices. We're inviting people into that meditative space that can

teach them to take 10 minutes out of their day to think through an idea because then that can become 10 minutes of reading, which can become 20, which can become 30. So I think we were on this trajectory for a long time, and, as with many things, the pandemic maybe exacerbated it. The good news is, I do believe—not because I am a professor who teaches great books, but because of science, and also because of the work I do in film—attention spans haven't gone away. People watch three-hour movies. People are upset when *House of the Dragon* or *Rings of Power* ends. They want more. They will watch *Emily in Paris* in one sitting. Netflix split it into two parts of the season so they get more eyeballs over time. We know that attention hasn't gone away; it's just being cultivated in different ways.

That's the bid to go meet people in the digital space and to teach them to feel and experience the difference when they do it offline. And it has been encouraging—a new project that we are building out at the moment, and we're grateful to the Honors College at Baylor for partnering with us. I just want to shout out Dr. Doug Henry, with whom I recently had a meeting about this, and Dr. Scott Moore. We're working on an ancient book called *Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy*—a very short book. Boethius fell out of favor with the ruler of Rome in 524 A.D., 1,500 years ago this year. He was sentenced to death, probably for a false accusation—maybe because he had written to the Emperor in the East to say, 'Hey, this guy's an Arian, we're going to have some problems with Orthodox Christianity.' We don't really know. But we do know that the sentencing came because his friend was accused of treason, his colleague was accused of treason, and Boethius had read a lot of Plato and Aristotle, and he spoke up. He said, 'Well, if he committed treason, I have too.' And they were like, 'Off with your head as well.'

The poor guy probably ended up—we think they tied a rope around his neck, they suffocated him until his eyes popped out of their sockets, and then they bludgeoned him to death. This is not a happy death. Maybe he thought he would have been drawn and quartered. None of these are good options. But he writes this little book while he's in prison awaiting that execution. In it, he poses questions about what is happiness, what is justice, why do bad things happen to good people. When life has you down, how can we find constancy in pursuing virtues and in thinking about the lessons we learn from old books? It's not about the books. It's about how the stories change our lives, and Lady Philosophy comes to visit him.

So we soft-launched—we're working on a feature film on Boethius, but we soft-launched a reading project to go with it, and we planned on starting to roll it out next fall. More will roll out next fall. Because we posted the trailer for the feature film—this is proof—within a day or two days, we had over 70,000 views. I think it's up around 100,000 now, and people were like, 'When can we see this?' They're like, 'You can't yet. It's not ready. We're editing it.' But we're launching a reading project next year, and many people—like we've had a range: students, but also politicians, founders, venture capitalists, people from across the world that we've never met, and also professors who have never read this book, or just people who are like, 'I want to read it in my retirement community'—have been sending us photos. We didn't ask for this—of them receiving their copy of *Boethius' Consolation* in the mail and saying, 'We need more content now.' So they're reading offline. You can spark enthusiasm to get people back into that slow reading, and we're not even helping them with that right now—they're doing it themselves. That's exciting.

CR: Well, I don't think I've lived long enough to have, you know, total credibility in this sphere, but it seems like we're in an era right now where so many pockets of American culture are so shallow and so vapid—maybe at an unprecedented level. That's where I'm like, well, maybe, maybe not. It's hard to say, but it sure feels like it right now. Do you think that that translates into increased desire into, like, what's the wisdom we can learn from our forebears, our intellectual fathers and mothers?

SJM: Well, some great news first, which is, I suspect this has always been the case, and we see it more. It's present for us more through things like social media and other technologies today. But when Alexis de Tocqueville visited America after the American Revolution, he said, "No, no, the tyranny of kings has been replaced by the tyranny of the court of public opinion, and America's downfall will be mob mentality." Sounds a lot like right now, right? Disillusion. And it wasn't as magnified then. So it's ever-present for us now. I'm a lot more hopeful than that, precisely because when you look throughout history, there have been these waves of ups and downs and then renaissances of reading. I think that our hyper-reliance on technology and on media—again, a space I work in precisely because of this, because we have to hold salt and light in these kinds of spaces too—what did we reach last year? This is post-pandemic. This is not during the pandemic: 13.1 hours on average of media consumption a day. Now, I don't consume 13.1 hours of media a day, which means that somebody's consuming even more, averaging me out. We will either err too far in that direction and enter the world of *Ready Player One*, or we'll start to value—and we're starting to hear this word being used a lot, even in technology spaces—in real life experiences more. This is a time in our culture to make a bid for what community and in real-life experiences look like so that we remain human-centered as a society, and we can be technology-powered, not led. There's a difference.

CR: And of course, that is forefront on so many people's minds as we're working through the implications of artificial intelligence or machine learning, as we were talking about before here. How has that gone into, you know, either your teaching or your work? Are you using artificial intelligence in your workflow in any way?

SJM: You know, I have been experimenting with large language learning models for a long time. I was part of a lab in France—who, this dates me—around 2000 when I was a graduate student. So over 20 years ago now, I was working in large language models, which is what turned into a lot of the machine learning artificial intelligence space we see now. So I've seen the virtues of it, right? There's an ability to crunch through data at an unprecedented rate, and we all benefit from that. I mean, while there are downsides to being connected in my phone, I have to remember, I'm piloting it. I can turn it off at any moment. Mine's turned off right now. I don't have to be connected all the time, but I have to cultivate that practice. At the same time, my phone is more powerful than the computers that sent people to the moon. There's something to be said for that when it can advance medicine and it can advance so much else.

So I think it's been very useful for me in trying to study trends and story, but I'm not going in for a quick fix. And that's what I'm seeing a lot: "Oh, this thing can do my work for me." No, no. If I like spreadsheets and I like suggestions from Google searches or spell check, I've been using machine learning for a long time. But I want to keep it being a tool. I don't want to bring my mentality to the tool, saying, "Maybe this can just write a novel for me, and I won't have to do it

myself." Have we really become so convinced that the product is so much more important than the journey? Because if we apply that to life, that means death is more important than our journey of life. So we have to think about that, and I really hope we can bring scientists and technologists and humanists together to talk about it as allies.

Because when I move in technology spaces, and when I'm sitting in a meeting with, say, venture capitalists and providing some advice or feedback, I tend to find that the technology spaces are very enthusiastic about asking questions about how they can learn from the humanities. Whereas in the humanities, we'll shut that door. Like, if we build a big enough floodgate, we can hold it back. My message to anyone who thinks that we can die on a hill and hold what is coming back is that the dinosaurs did not know a comet was coming. They couldn't prepare for it in any way, and they could do nothing about it. That comet is coming for us, and we have to learn to create people who drive and pilot the technology rather than outsource being human to it. Because a machine will never be human, and also, a machine shouldn't be trying to be.

CR: Yeah. Yeah. What worries me on a large scale is that if we start allowing machines to do the artistry and intellectual work for us at those high levels, then we essentially give up on creativity and on seeing anything beyond what's already there, because at least the way artificial intelligence—generative AI—works now, it can really only repackage what it already has. So that means you could spin out pretty quickly that it would never be able to produce a new movement in...

SJM: That's right.

CR: Or a new movement in literature. It just is not equipped to do that. So that would be the very worst thing in terms of our intellectual lives as humans.

SJM: That's exactly right. I think a lot of technologists would agree this is a branding problem, and I'll explain that. We're even calling this thing "generative"—that's what you hear. To be clear, technologists will qualify in every meeting: machine learning, a.k.a. artificial intelligence, is not generative, and it will probably never be generative in our lifetimes. It may be generative one day, but "generative" means generating something new. It is predictive. But that is a less catchy word for the general public. So it's definitely raised awareness, but in the wrong ways, because people are then thinking to use it in a pseudo-generative way.

What does predictive mean? Let's take ChatGPT—that's something that all of our students are wrestling with, and that faculty are grappling with. I'm not so worried about it because I learned to write essays in France when I was a kid by writing in Bluebooks, in class. And I've been doing that to be clear. I've known ChatGPT was coming before it was released, so seven years ago, I started doing in-class essays again, preparing for it and testing our best practices. It was a chance to be ahead of the curve in terms of dealing with this and bringing best practices to the table for colleagues.

So what it means when we say it's predictive is that ChatGPT, in the earlier versions that were released—I haven't studied the recent version yet or talked to people who are involved in it to know the answer to this—but let's take ChatGPT-4. It essentially will look, if you instruct it, at a

body of text in the same vein as what you're trying to create, and it will take a sample of 10,000 characters or 10,000 words. Then it will study that sample, and all it does is predict the next letter. So it's never having an idea; it's never even predicting a word. It's predicting the next character, which could be a letter, a space, or a punctuation mark. If ChatGPT can write the essays we're asking someone to write in class, the problem, my friends, is not ChatGPT. It's that we're thinking that learning has something to do with teaching humans to think in a predictive way like a computer.

CR: Well said.

SJM: We've got the problem back to front, and we have to change that. I want students who are having ideas. I want students who are putting this idea from *The Iliad* together with this idea from *Breaking Bad* and realizing that there's an eternal truth that emerges about what it means to be human, which they can understand almost intuitively, but they're providing evidence for it.

CR: Right.

SJM: Prediction and intuition—that's where the parallel for generation, I think, breaks down. And the same is true of art. Now, can my editor for a film do better creative work nowadays because he doesn't have to snip film? Digital film, like every technology that has landed on Earth, has resulted in widespread panic. I mean, digital film would be the end of the 35mm film industry. Well, it was, and a whole new industry emerged. But let's go further back—the printing press.

I studied manuscript culture for many years, and I still work as a philologist in manuscript culture, which means that I love studying, on the level of the word, all the way down to the artifact itself. It's a big word to say that, and I want to find meaning in the documents that I study. You can see this trend when the printing press was not invented in the West. We had the printing press much earlier in, say, China, but it was different. It wasn't movable type because, with the characters, it wasn't as easy to create movable type. So the import of it to the West radically changed the world and how we disseminate information—it's like a pre-computer.

There was a widespread panic because all the scribes illuminators would be out of work, and al the manuscript illuminators would be out of work. And we feel a lot less empathy for that today because it's far away. So a lot of people circled the wagons and resisted the printing press. Well, how did that go for them? We don't even remember those authors because they didn't appear in print—they've been lost. The text that I worked on for ten years translating, it's the first translation since 1320. It has been lost to the world after being one of the most popular books in the world, the *Ovide Moralisé*, because it never really penetrated print culture, even though it did appear in many beautiful manuscripts. How much wisdom has been lost because the scholars who sought to preserve it circled the wagons?

We don't want this to be another printing press situation. We don't want a feud—this is not a hill to die on. How do we make the space more holistic? That's the question I want to see us answer.

CR: This is getting pretty far afield, but I have to ask you because I know you're in the industry as well. How do you feel about the way writers handled the strike, especially with regard to their demands on AI?

SJM: Oh, what a great question. So this is where we get down to intellectual property, right? And I think this is very, very important. This is part of the lack of ethics in the space. That's why I'm really big into ethics and AI, and a lot of people are. But in the for-profit space, you know, studios are looking to cut the bottom line. So what are they doing? They say, "Well, I bought this script from you, and you were in my writing room for all of these scripts. So now I'm going to have AI contribute to this show." And to be clear, we have some experiences recently that I will not name, but if you can think of a favorite television show and wonder why the season looked like a mash-up of everything they've done before, and there was nothing new, it was partially written by AI.

So this goes to your point, right, of not generating anything new. There's a thing called moral rights in US law, and that's what we generate and create that can't be taken away from us in our intellectual property—our likeness, our generative creations, all that kind of stuff. Those writers weren't striking so that their jobs continue to exist because they don't want their computers replacing them. They don't want someone profiteering and making millions of dollars of the work they've done. But, it's always been the case in precedent in US law, though there is no precedent yet in this AI space, or not much of it.

So the studios are trying to see what they can do. It's always been the case, for example, that if you created a character like Frasier on a show like *Cheers*, and then it got turned into a show called *Frasier*, you got paid for that appearance of that character and your intellectual property every time they appeared on screen, even if you weren't writing on *Frasier*. I think that's where we'll go with AI once the court precedents are set. But we have some bad actors right now—not actual actors, like companies—who are trying to profiteer and cut out the creator. And this is problematic because you might think, "Well, people get paid millions of dollars in the entertainment industry." Some actors do. Writers often get paid often like a professor or not as well, because the work is not always current. They can't afford that. They live off of those residuals, and they were striking or did strike not just for the right to be artists and to generate properties, but to say, "We don't want to set this precedent where you can take anything I make and you own me."

I spoke about this in the education space several years ago. I was at a meeting in New York, and there were some investors and venture capitalists involved. It was a meeting about non-predatory loans and higher education, so I was interested in this until I found out the ideas: "Well, we'll invest and pay for the education, and instead of you having to pay it back, we'll own a percentage of all your future earnings for life." And I said, "Well, that sounds a lot like indentured servitude." So people weren't trying to be predatory; they thought they were providing a solution. Because that's what you do when you invest in a company—but a person is not a company. That's the moral right.

CR: Right, There's the line.

SJM: So that's what the writers were worried about, and I think for good cause. I do believe the legal system will catch up. But I call this the law if- this is why we can't have nice things. Why are we training artificial intelligence models on things or people's voices, like Scarlett Johansson, or on paintings, without the authority to do so, or without authorization? Why can't we focus more on open-source models? That's where the real work comes—where we say, 'you're letting us work with your stuff so that we can create better things for the world.' For-profit spaces probably shouldn't be leading the charge for machine learning. We're going to see a lot of that over the years to come.

You mentioned art, so let's say a few words about that. Things can be generated with machines that all your favorite shows are using- like *The Lord of the Rings* is not shot always against beautiful real backdrops, right? *Boardwalk Empire*. The whole world where it plays out, your should go online and see how it was done is all constructed against green screen. You know, this is machine-generated art, and it's dubbed as such. We should not think that we're becoming Michel Angelo when we do that. But that's also a call to our culture to invest in what Makoto Fujimura calls "slow art" as you called slow reading. I mean, art takes time. It takes commitment. It takes people's lives. And we used to always have royal patrons who paid for this. The Italian Renaissance happened in no small part, thanks to the backing of the Medici family—who were not always good people who made good choices, but they were extraordinary patrons of the arts.

When a society disappears, and hundreds of years, even millennia after it's gone, you know what doesn't survive? All the stuff that's occupying our time today. Fights on social media. There's always been political fights. Socrates was put to death for one. Politics go away. Nobody really remembers what rulers did. But we love the art. We love the stories. And yet our culture is perhaps the first in the 21st century to discard that, like it's not important and to not funnel the money towards it or to try to own it as a commodity. That's a problem, and that's what the artists are striking for.

CR: I imagine this is precisely why you have something on your own faculty web page that kind of gets at your teaching philosophy here. You want to make a distinction between a well-formed and a well-filled mind. And I imagine, as I said, that this has something to do with your investment in these students because they are where our culture is going, right?

SJM: That's right. I don't want in any way ever to control their thoughts or to set them up with a framework of thinking like me. I want them to learn to build their own. This goes back to your virtue formation. These are the guardrails that they choose to embrace as directives for their life, and I can help them fine-tune those.

I came across that expression in French, 'un esprit bien fait,' by Michel de Montaigne, having a well-made mind rather than a well-filled one, a long time ago, now. It's wild to think coming back. So the work I'm doing now, this trajectory was set for me when I was 12 years old. I had recently moved to France and I had just learned to read enough French to keep up with the curriculum in school. We were reading some essays by Michel de Montaigne, the first essayist in the world. He invents the genre. He calls them essays from the French verb ese to try. He's trying something new. He's trying to share more of his personal thoughts and ideas, why slavery is bad, what it means to be a good reader, etc.

He has one essay called 'On the Instruction of Children,' and it actually inspired me to go on to learn Latin and Greek when I was a teenager because he often quotes in Latin and Greek without translating.

CR: Sure, yeah.

SJM: The teacher would be like, 'This is what that means,' but our teacher was smart. Monsieur Sara. I owe him a debt of gratitude for igniting in me a fire to learn about these things. That's the power teachers have. He would say, 'I'm giving you this version the way he wrote it, and I'll tell you what it means. But if you want to understand these essays, you have to learn to read Latin and Greek.' I thought, 'I'm going to do it, Mr. Monsieur. I'm going to learn Latin and Greek.'

So, we read it, and he says, 'You know, the point is not to fill our minds, as so much of modern education seeks to do, with rote memorization.' This was also a problem in Montaigne's time. He was saying, 'This is what we do for education; there's nothing new under the sun.' When you study the past, you realize this. He says, 'We have to digest that food, that mental food.' We have to be like bees—this is the image he uses—who go from flower to flower and take the pollen, and then we have to go back and make the honey. He says, 'When we've done that, those words we learned and absorbed and made our own from Plato and Aristotle and Seneca and whoever else you want to throw in there, they are no longer their words; they become ours.'

And that's the way I view the relationship with my students. I want to present them with opportunities to gather the thoughts that they will form into their own frameworks so that they can make their own contributions very unique to the world. You know, a good friend of mine—I'll give a shout-out to him here—is Paul Young, who wrote *The Shack* and who has been a great mentor in my life as well. Like Monsieur Sara, he told me that the problem with people today is that we all want to be extraordinary, special, an influencer. When in reality, being extraordinary is about being interesting, being ordinary in the etymological sense—being who we were put here to be. Making our contributions because we already are special just the way we are, really learning to place a megaphone for that and to help us find our calling. That's what's kept me in education.

CR: Well, thank you for that. Thank you for coming on the show today.

SJM: Thank you.

CR: For all the work you do here at Baylor with our students. The research you're doing into education, everything you're doing outside of Baylor as well. Sarah Jane Murray, was a pleasure to have you on the show.

SJM: What a pleasure to be here, and thanks to ATL.

CR: Our thanks again to Dr. Sarah Jane Murray for joining us today. In our show notes, you'll find a link to Dr. Murray's the Greats Story lab and Robert Talbert's post on the 12-week course plan. Help out our show by subscribing and giving us a five Star review. That's our show. Join us next time for Professors Talk Pedagogy.