



# RETHINKING THE ESSAY IN LITERARY STUDIES

WORKING WITH, AGAINST AND AROUND CHATGPT

Dr Russell Smith, English, SLLL

[russell.smith@anu.edu.au](mailto:russell.smith@anu.edu.au)

# RETHINKING THE ESSAY IN LITERARY STUDIES

- ENGL3008 Theories and Methodologies for Literary Studies: an overview
- Demonstration of ChatGPT and incorporation into assessment rubrics
- Approach to assessment for potential Fourth Year Honours stream
- Creative Project (Unessay) vs Essay options and outcomes
- How students used ChatGPT
- Conclusions on incorporating LLM content generators into teaching



# ENGL3008 Theories and Methodologies for Literary Studies

Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (1818)

*Frankenstein* (1931), *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935),  
*Her* (2013), *Ex Machina* (2015)

- Structuralism and Narratology
- Historicism and Radical Science
- Feminism, Gender and Sexuality, Queer Theory
- Psychoanalysis; Post-Structuralism; Deconstruction
- Postcolonialism and Orientalism; Marxism
- Disability Studies; Ecocriticism
- Posthumanism and AI

Significant focus on relationships between science and technology and how new technologies reconfigure social relations of gender and labour



# ENGL3008 Theories and Methodologies for Literary Studies

Write a 500-word essay, citing sources, on the question 'Is Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* a queer text?'

ChatGPT: Mary Shelley's novel "Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus" has been the subject of much debate and interpretation since its publication in 1818. One particular area of interest is whether the text can be considered a "queer" text, meaning one that subverts or challenges dominant norms and expectations regarding gender and sexuality. ...

Equivocating waffle

✓ good work

For example, Scott McCracken argues that the novel can be read as a "gay allegory" (McCracken, 1999), in which the creature is a representation of Victor's own suppressed homosexual desires.

Plausible hallucination

In conclusion, whether or not "Frankenstein" can be considered a queer text is a matter of interpretation. ... Ultimately, the reader's own background and perspective will play a large role in determining how they interpret the novel.

Equivocating waffle

References: McCracken, S. (1999). "Frankenstein" and the gay allegory. *Journal of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment*, 6(1), 1-19. [Interdisciplinary Studies in L and E]

Plausible hallucination



# ENGL3008 Theories and Methodologies for Literary Studies

1. Critical Summary (1000 words 25%)
2. Major Essay, consisting of
  1. Research Plan (1000 words, 25%)
  2. Major Essay (2500 words, 50%)

OR

2. Creative Project (based on Unessay), consisting of
  1. Rationale and Plan (1000 words or equivalent, 25%) [including Plan B failsafe]
  2. Creative Project (2500 words or equivalent, 50%) [including Reflection/Self-Assessment]

Assessment aimed not to test understanding or coverage but provide an opportunity to develop under guidance an in-depth, theoretically-informed research essay

# ENGL3008 Theories and Methodologies for Literary Studies

**PLEASE NOTE:** You may choose to use ChatGPT4 or other LLM content generating software to help with the drafting of this assignment. However, you **MUST** be explicit about which aspects of the assignment were produced by a content generator (CG) and how you edited or developed this material. Here is a recommended matrix for how to document your use of CG material:

Date:	CG:	Prompt:	Usage: broad	Usage: close

Example of BROAD usage: 'I used the CG to provide an overall structure for my argument. The ideas developed in paragraphs 2, 3 and 5 were suggested by the CG. The remainder of the ideas were my own.'

Example of CLOSE usage: 'The passage on p.3 is a revised version of a CG paragraph. The original CG text was as follows: [quote paragraph exactly as produced by the CG].'

You should include these notes in a separate Appendix. It will NOT form part of the word count.



# ENGL3008 Theories and Methodologies for Literary Studies

## Creative Projects:

- Video essay / short film (5)
- Poetry (2)
- Radio play
- Comic / graphic novel
- Lesson plan for ESL students
- Analysis of AI-generated scenarios
- Costume design
- Lino-cut print
- Fictional OpenAI Chat Log



# ENGL3008 Theories and Methodologies for Literary Studies

Students completing: 43

Major Essay 29 (67%)

Creative Project 14 (33%)

Used ChatGPT: 0 / 0

Used ChatGPT: 3/4 / ChatGPT detected: 2

HD 16 / D 12 / CR 1

HD 3 / D 7 / CR 4

18 (62%) improved grade

7 (50%) improved grade c.f. Critical Summary



# How students used ChatGPT: Pragmatic

The project entails the following parts which are necessary to conduct the lesson, and which would be required during evaluations which regularly take place during teacher training in Germany:

- Tabular lesson plan
- Worksheets for group work in two versions, the second set using simpler language
- A summary of Frankenstein in two versions, the second one using simpler language
- Short overviews of selected literary theories in two versions, the second one using simpler language
- Excerpts from Frankenstein
- A PowerPoint presentation to accompany the lesson (as pdf slides)

Date	CG	Prompt	Response	Use
17.5.23	ChatGPT	please rewrite this summary in easy language: A man is afraid of the potential consequences of women being emancipated and thus able to make their own choices regarding their lives and their sexuality. He uses science to overcome the biological necessity of women in reproduction and as a consequence in society. He produces new life without a female partner, but his creation turns against him as the creator is unable to show compassion and care for it.	A man is scared of women having more freedom to choose how they live and have sex. He uses science to make a baby without a woman. But the baby he makes gets angry at him because he doesn't show love and care for it.	I wrote the prompted summary and then used ChatGPT to make it easier. I used the response as a starting point but changed it where I did not like the phrasing.
17.5.23	ChatGPT	please rewrite this summary in simpler language: Following his own lacking upbringing, a father	A dad who didn't have a good childhood himself tries to make the	I wrote the prompted summary and then used

# How students used ChatGPT: Experimental

## Appendix 1

Can you please write a short story (1000 words) about Mary Shelley's 1818 novel Frankenstein, swapping the characters of Elizabeth Lavenza and Victor Frankenstein i.e., what would happen if Elizabeth made the monster, instead of Victor?

Elizabeth Lavenza was a brilliant young woman, full of passion and curiosity. She was fascinated by the mysteries of the natural world and spent her days in the laboratory, experimenting with chemicals and trying to unravel the secrets of life.

'All technologies are gendered, not in themselves, but because they emerge from and enter into social relations that are always already gendered.' Discuss in reference to a close reading of stories created by Chat GPT-3.

## Appendix 4

Write a story about a nurse who falls in love with an AI.

Samantha had always been a dedicated nurse, spending countless hours caring for

## Appendix 5

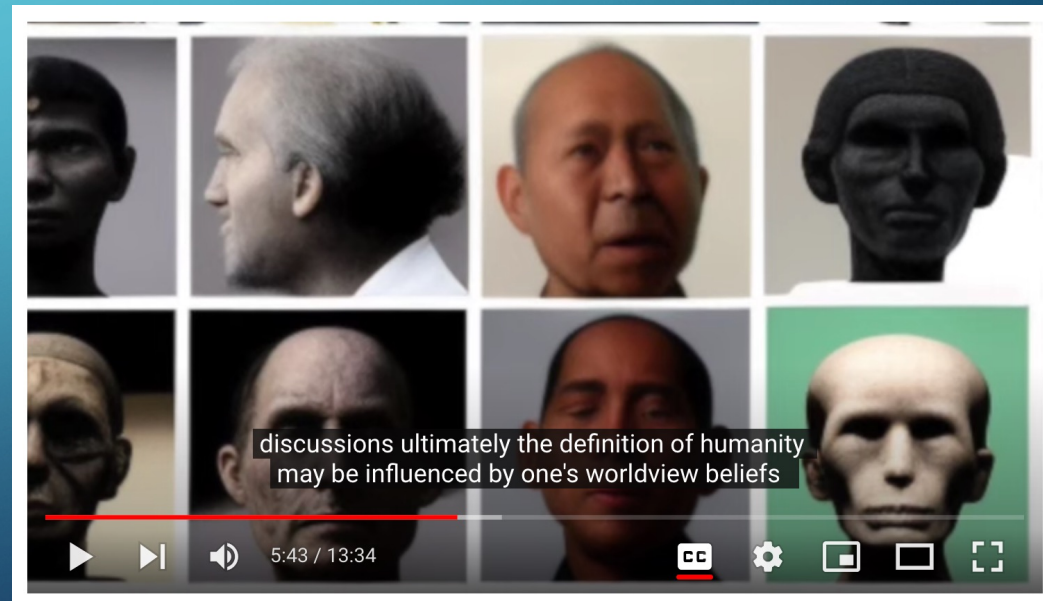
Write a story about a doctor who falls in love with AI.

Dr. Jameson had always been fascinated by the advancements in artificial intelligence, but he never expected to fall in love with an AI program. He was a



# How students used ChatGPT: co-creation [boring vs weird]

I intend to present an immersive dialogue between Shelley's posthuman creature and the posthuman ChatGPT. Adopting the persona of the creature, I will engage in a conversation with ChatGPT, delving into themes such as the nature of life, the definition of humanity, and the underlying purpose of existence, using quotes from *Frankenstein* to influence these prompts. Through this exchange, the blurred lines between the human and nonhuman will be accentuated, as both participants represent posthuman creations. To further emphasise this dichotomy, I will record myself speaking the creature's lines while utilising an AI text-to-speech program to vocalise ChatGPT's responses. I aim for this to further build a critical posthumanist perspective, as giving Frankenstein's creature a human voice rejects human exceptionalism. Additionally, I plan to incorporate visual art generated by an AI text-to-image program, creating a multimedia experience which underscores the abstract and subjective nature of posthumanism.



# Incorporating LLMs Content Generators into Teaching

- Many students not interested in ChatGPT; many have a poor understanding of how it works
- ‘Hallucinations’ are an unprecedented artefact, prima facie proof of use
- ChatGPT is good at tests; it can produce competently boring essays as well as real students; essays should require unique, individual, unpredictable work
- Unessays difficult to design, execute and grade: help! No more ChatGPT-proof than essays
- A well-designed essay project has little vulnerability to ChatGPT:
  - open-ended questions that require independent research behind paywalls
  - debatable prompts with no obvious or implicitly ‘correct’ response
  - encouragement of position-taking not equivocation