ENG 205                Genre:                Fall 2020
crn: 12463               Blurbs                Quinn Miller

Zoom Classes:  Tues and Thurs, 10:15-11:45am (Pacific Time)
Contact Quinn:  Canvas messages; or email qmmiller@uoregon.edu
Office Hours:   Wednesdays, 9am - noon and also by request

Course Work:
2 Blurbs (with accompanying essaylets) - 30 points total
3 writing exercises (choose from many options) - 30 points total
Short essay (analyzing blurb(s) vis-à-vis a text as a whole) - 10 points
Quiz questions (open format) - 20 points
Wrap-up (self-evaluation, attendance report, Blurb 3, etc.) - 10 points
+ other available options

Learning Objectives
1) Read literary/cultural texts with discernment and comprehension
   and with an understanding of their conventions. 2) Draw on cultural
   and historical information to situate texts within various competing
   contexts. 3) Analyze formal elements of composition, capitalism,
   circulation, tone, satire. 4) Raise questions, research questions,
   compose blurbs, and write insightful commentary on blurbs.
Course Description

This course examines the pithy praise appearing on book jackets and other product packaging. Blurbs are quick descriptions. They encourage consumption and a culture of evaluating texts for their artistry and importance. How far back in time does blurring go? How big can a blurb be before it ceases to be a blurb? What distinctions exist among blurbs, the texts they address, reviews, and other forms of criticism? This course uses queer media studies and transgender studies to consider such questions. Emphasis will be on pushing the limits of the category, including through study of music distribution and capsule summaries of sitcoms. We will discuss issues of style, representation, and power by studying blurbs and other types of shortform writing, including by looking at endorsements (of varying lengths, in a range of venues) of everything from art to eateries.

Content Warning CW (TW): This course may solicit relatively intensive self-exploration. Course material may include slurs, nudity, violence, sex, misgendering, and reference to sexual assault and harassment, as well as cissexist and heterosexist social mores and assumptions and traces of the racism and sexism of white Anglocentric elitism. This material and commentary may appear without advance warning. If representations and discussion of expressive sexuality, substance use, self-harm, social variance, sex work, and social and sexual taboo transgression may present any problems for you, please let the professor (and/or the group) know to avoid it or take extra care with it.
Expectations
* Practice self-care for trigger mitigation. Read, re-read, and study assigned texts. Prepare questions and comments for discussion. Review your notes and materials. Respect people’s backgrounds, names, pronouns, contributions, frames of reference, and digital space. For example, do not guess someone’s pronoun. Let the professor know, to the extent you can, your access points for course materials, as well as any accommodations you may need or want.

Schedule

WEEK ONE

T 9/29

introductory discussion

TH 10/1

genre blurbery


0. (optional) context packet for Garrett’s work
**WEEK TWO**

* writing exercise due Wednesday

T 10/6

academic blubbery

1. Erin Hill, *Never Done: A History of… Media Production*

W 10/7

* writing exercise due today

office hours Friday (9-noon) instead of Wednesday this week

TH 10/8

industrial blurb context (blurb industry basics)


2. Ruland, “When Blurbs Go Bad” (2014)


WEEK THREE
* writing exercise due Wednesday

beginning with the end… of the original Blurbs: student finds
(optional: blurbs and essaylets = student work shared with consent)

T 10/13
blurb inflation and “farcical self-flagellation”
   cw: suicide (Anne Sexton, Sylvia Plath mentioned)

W 10/14
* writing exercise due today

TH 10/15
meta-time-tripping and “literal [C]apitalizing”
0. (optional) Schwimmer, “Must-See Spectacle” (2019)
WEEK FOUR

* Blurb due Thursday

blurb politics from digital front matter to back author photos

T 10/20

e-blurbs and oeuvre blurbing

1. Morrison, Beloved ebook front matter, foreword, back matter
   cw: racism, assault, slavery (writing it); q-word

TH 10/22

material culture and class

Jhumpa Lahiri’s The Clothing of Books

1. Chapter Three: “Correspondence and Collaboration”

0. (optional) “Why a Cover?”, “The Charm of the Uniform”

* Blurb and essaylet due today
WEEK FIVE

T 10/27
industrial blurb complex
1. Lee, “We Need to Destroy the Blurbing Industrial Complex”

TH 10/29
back to the genre
1. Gerritsen, “Why Do We Blurb?”

WEEK SIX

* writing exercise due Wednesday

T 11/3 etymological excavation
1. Anu Garg, “Coined Words” comments
2. Karen Matthews, “The Legacy of Miss Belinda Blurb”
3. Amelia Beamer, “Belinda Blurb...Blurbing” [cw]
4. OED and Wheeler’s Dictionary of Literary Vocabulary
5. Xah Lee, “Etymology of Blurb”
6. Merriam-Webster, “Must-Read, Smash Hit Story”
W 11/4

* writing exercise due today

TH 11/5

sexism and unskewings

1. Estelle Loomis

2. Burgess, *The Lark, The Purple Cow*, “Readable Writing,” “Recent Researches into the Psychology of Boredom”…

3. Sandler, *Black Romantic Revolution*

0. *Black Romantic Revolution* event: 12-2pm

WEEK SEVEN

T 11/10

way, way back

1. Swick, “The Book Blurb”

TH 11/12

more recent erasures (and televisual blurbifications)

1. Ariano and Bunting, *Television Without Pity*
2. Miller, “The Best Thing the Internet is about to Lose”

WEEK EIGHT

* Blurb due Thursday

T 11/17

more critics

1. Harvilla, “The Art of the Pan” (and Paskin and/or Chu [cw])
2. Odell, *Resisting the Attention Economy*

TH 11/19

* Blurb and essaylet due today

self-satirical consumer capitalism

1. Matthews, “Cheesy?”
2. Jones, “Parody Trumps Original Content”
3. Scanlan, “B is for Blurb, S is for Summary”
4. Rosenbaum, “…*The New York Times* is Behind the Times”
WEEK NINE

* Short essay due Monday

T 11/24

genres, deconstructed

1. Edgar + Sedgwick, “Genre”
2. Neal + Turner, “Genre...” + “Uses...”

TH 11/26 NO CLASS

WEEK TEN

M 11/30 Short essay due today

* Quiz questions due Friday

T 12/1

recap

1. Miller, “Beware of Blurbs”
2. Levinovitz, “I Greet You in the Middle of a Great Career”
TH 12/3

academic poetics

0. Rankine, *Citizen: An American Lyric*
0. Lin, *Blurb*
0. Galchen, *Little Labors*
0. Berlant and Stewart, *The Hundreds*
0. Tuck and Ree, “A Glossary of Haunting”

F 12/4 Quiz questions due

* Wrap-up assignment due Tuesday, December 8

* No final exam