Topics in Transnational Literature and Culture: Oceanic Studies
ENG 673.600
Fall 2016 / Dr. Shawna Ross

Distribution requirements:
One course organized around concepts, issues, or themes, rather than chronologically;
One course in English without Borders (transnational and/or diasporic literatures/cultures/theory; interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary study; cultural study of film, digital technologies, new media, popular culture)

The rise of oceanic studies across a number of literary fields, underlined by numerous special issues in academic journals (including PMLA in 2010 and Atlantic Studies in 2013), has encouraged transnational scholars to revisit both the imaginative and institutional histories of the ocean. This course will pair theoretical and critical works on oceanic studies with literary texts from a variety of times and places. Students will write weekly 2-page responses, submitted the night before class; write and present a “state of the field” review of oceanic studies scholarship in the student’s home discipline; and will write a 20-25-page seminar paper that applies oceanic studies to a text, author, or other analytical object from the student’s home discipline.

We will read a number of pieces of oceanic literature alongside scholarship, beginning with Paul Gilroy’s The Black Atlantic and Ian Baucom’s Specters of the Atlantic before moving onto self-consciously “oceanic studies” definitions by Hester Blum, Margaret Cohen, Iain Chambers, Elizabeth DeLoughrey, Gaurav Desai, and others. Readings may include texts such as the Odyssey, The Tempest, Melville’s “Benito Cereno,” Conrad’s Nigger of the Narcissus, Johnson’s The Middle Passage, Diem Thuy’s The Gangers We Are All Looking For, Ghosh’s Sea of Poppies, Hong Kingston’s The Woman Warrior, Sackville-West’s No Signposts in the Sea, and poems by Walcott, Coleridge, and Borges. We will consider these texts alongside other works of art, including operas (Wagner’s The Flying Dutchman), symphonics (by Elgar, Williams, and Eshun) and paintings (by J. M. W. Turner, Willem van de Velde, and Katsushika Hokusai). We will end the course by considering contemporary environmentalist literature that focuses on the ocean, using it to explore the contemporary exigency of oceanic studies as a discipline.