Neptune’s Children: Early Modern Waterways
An interdisciplinary conference on rivers, oceans, and ships in the early modern world
24th May 2019, T. S. Eliot Lecture Theatre, Merton College, Oxford
Organisers: Lorna Hutson and Katherine Ibbett
assistance: Fraser Buchanan

Our work as early modernists has been shaped by the great eddies of sea studies which have, over decades, challenged the way we think about the national and the global, from Braudel’s Mediterranean, via John Elliott’s Atlantic, to Steve Mentz’s shipwrecks. In gathering together Neptune’s Children, we ask what might happen when we look at the world from the perspective of rather different waters: from swamps, from lakes, from rivers; from the Indian Ocean, Mexico City, or the Firth of Forth; from bluewater, brownwater and bilgewater. We bring together scholars of early modern Europe, India, and Latin America, who are historians, literary and legal specialists; and although Neptune fathers many of our watery discussions, we’re expecting that the Aztec god Tláloc might also talk back. How can we think better about early modern water, in a world in which water is once again a pressing political concern?

Programme:

10.00-11.30  Worldwide waters
Professor Farid Azvar (Swarthmore) ‘From Madagascar to Buenos Aires: How to Narrate the Indo-Atlantic’
Professor Ivonne del Valle, (UC Berkeley) ‘Tláloc: A general economy’

11.30-11.45  Coffee, tea and biscuits

11.45-1.15  French Floating
Professor Katherine Ibbett (Trinity, Oxford) ‘Staying Afloat in Early Modern French Writing’
Dr Jennifer Oliver (St John’s, Oxford) ‘Writing shipwrecked bodies from the shallows to the depths: canoes, rafts, bricolage’

1.15-2.15  Lunch

2.15-4.15  Unislanding England
Professor Sebastian Sobecki (Groningen) ‘The Narrowest Seas: The Libelle of Englyshe Polycye and the Afterlife of a Fifteenth-Century Argument’
Professor Lorna Hutson (Merton, Oxford) ‘Firths and Estuaries: Amphibious and Imperial Fantasies, 1547-1617’
Dr Jemima Matthews (King’s College, London), ‘Oceanus and Tamesis: The cultural geography of aqueous performance in London 1604-1605’

4.15-5.00  Coffee, tea and biscuits

5.00-5.45  Respondents: Professor Andrew McRae (Exeter – Places of Poetry Project) and Professor Nandini Das (Liverpool – TIDE Project). Open discussion.

5.45-6.30  Drinks on lawn