Call for Papers: Special Issue of *American Literature*: Post-Exceptionalist Puritanism

**Extended Deadline: December 1st, 2016**

The Puritans were a group of people loosely defined through a shared and often zealous adherence to the reformed theological tradition, largely following the work of John Calvin. Beginning in the sixteenth century, the Puritan movement took root in specific regional locales throughout Germany, Scotland, the Low Countries, and England. Religious conflict simmered from the 1580s forward and intensified during the reign of Charles I (1625–49) as Puritans repeatedly called for further reform, often through appeals to the early church and antiquity. Religious tension and persecution caused groups of Puritans over the years to leave England in search of new lands and communities.

Given this schismatic beginning, it is perhaps ironic that in the twentieth-century, particularly in the work of Perry Miller and Sacvan Bercovitch, the New England Puritans bore the weight of American origins, standing at the head of a tradition that would eventuate in the United States and its national literature. The postexceptionalist wave of Puritan scholarship, which has been ongoing for over a decade, has effectively decoupled Puritanism from this larger telos of American origins. As a result, new historiographic tools have emerged for studying and understanding Puritanism in a variety of contexts. In this special issue, we seek reflections on the contributions of Puritanism and Puritan studies to American literature and literary studies writ large, with a special emphasis on three keywords: temporality, geography, and aesthetics.

What happens, for example, if we imagine the Puritans as the end of an historical era, rather than the beginning of something else? If we invoke their relation to Catholicism as one of debts and borrowings rather than decisive schisms? If we follow the trajectory of Puritanism
beyond the colonial era, what new places, forms, and guises appear? How does a consideration of temporality as an analytic category shift our understanding of Puritanism? Can we speak of Puritans in Southern literature, in Western literature, in Caribbean literature? If so, how? And why? How do we write about and teach such matters in the classroom? Where do Puritans fit in American literature today and what does that tell us about our scholarly paradigms?

Second, what new geographies recontextualize our understanding of the Puritans? Books such as Carla Gardina Pestana’s *Protestant Empire* (2009) and John Elliott’s *Empires of the Atlantic World* (2006) place Puritanism squarely within Atlantic and hemispheric frames. How might we reconsider a Puritan diaspora, set apart from the long-standing geographic fixity of Puritan New England? Puritanism was radically transformed through missionary encounters, interactions with foreign landscapes, new peoples, and new religious communities. How do we understand these changes as both rooted in a particular time and place and also as part of a larger Atlantic world? Can we talk of Indigenous or African Puritanisms? The Puritans advance Atlantic perspectives and resist them. One larger question that we wish this special issue to address is how the Puritans can inhabit both American and Atlantic Studies.

Finally, how might we imagine new approaches to Puritan studies as specifically literary, aesthetic, and hermeneutic endeavors? How can we account for and grapple with global and Atlanticist respatializations in explicitly literary terms? That is, what new texts and textualities, new objects of analysis, new literacies, and new ways of reading do we make available to students and scholars when we attend to the real and fictive contexts of Puritanism? What portable hermeneutics carry forward to later literary periods? Conversely, what hermeneutical perspectives gained from other fields might enable us to approach the Puritans in new ways?
More pointedly, what practices and literacies make new and fundamental contributions to our understanding of the relation between narrative form and colonial history?

Submissions of 11,000 words or less (including endnotes and references) should be submitted electronically at www.editorialmanager.com/al/default.asp by December 1, 2016. When choosing a submission type, select “Submission-Special Issue-Puritanism.” For assistance with the submission process, please contact the office of American Literature at am-lit@duke.edu or (919) 684-3396. For inquiries about the content of the issue, please contact the coeditors: Sarah Rivett (srivett@princeton.edu), Cristobal Silva (cs2889@columbia.edu), and Abram Van Engen (vanengen@wustl.edu).