Literature, American Style

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LITERATURE, AMERICAN STYLE

THE ORIGINALITY OF IMITATION
IN THE EARLY REPUBLIC

EZRA TAWIL

PENN

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*For Kirsten
and
for Jules*

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The literature that should characterize a great people is always interesting to examine, I believe: the literature of an enlightened people, who have established liberty, political equality, and manners in harmony with such institutions. Right now the Americans are the only nation in the universe to which these reflections are applicable. Americans may still have no developed literature, but when their men in public office are called upon to address public opinion they obviously possess the gift of touching the soul's affections with simple truths and pure feelings. Anyone who can do this already knows the most useful secrets of style.

—Germaine de Staël, *On Literature* (1800)

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