

December 4th, 2020 – Growing Democracy

This month, in honour of the recent U.S. elections and the America holiday, Thanksgiving, we will look at the importance horticulture played in the foundation of the United States of America. We will also discuss connections between horticulture and revolution in Europe, including the views of the progressive Sicilian elite of the 1800s. Don't worry if you can't read all of the text provided. Do your best to look at the main text, and read supplementary texts if you have time. One of the supplementary texts is in Italian. Grammar exercises are for those who would like some material for self-study. Any questions will be answered at the end of the literature discussion.

Main text

- Wulf, Andrea (2011). *Founding gardeners*. Vintage, Prologue.

Optional reading

- Norwich, John Julius (2015). *Sicily: A Short History from the Ancient Greeks to Cosa Nostra*. London: John Murray Publishers, ch. 13.
- Mack Smith, Dennis & Marghieri Lucia Biocca (1973). *Storia della Sicilia medievale e moderna*. Bari: Editori Laterza, ch. 38.
- Wulf, Andrea (2011). *Founding gardeners*. Vintage, ch 3.

Grammar exercises

- Murphy, Raymond (2012). *English Grammar in Use: A self-study reference and practice book for intermediate learners of English*, Fourth edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Unit 5-8 (a review of the past tenses in English: Past simple, past continuous and present perfect).

Discussion Questions

1. The writer, Andrea Wulf, is not American. She was born in India, grew up in Germany, and moved to London as a University student. Does she have a different perspective than an American would?
2. Wulf writes "America exuded a confidence that seemed to be rooted in its power to harness nature to man's will and I thought of it as an industrial, larger-than-life country". This seems like a view of "Trump's America". However, there is another American relationship to nature that gave rise to the first National Parks, the environmental movement, and organic agriculture. The 2020 presidential election was also a competition between these two relationships to nature. The winning candidate, Joe Biden, made global warming and the environment an important part of his campaign. How is the environment politicized in Italy?
3. Wulf quotes Benjamin Franklin in saying that "Agriculture is the only honest way" that a country can accrue national wealth. She also cites a famous speech by James Madison in which he says that the protection of the environment is essential to the survival of a nation. Are our European, Italian, and Sicilian governments as attentive to protecting agriculture and natural capital?
4. Why did Franklin start the first American "buy local" movement and how was seed collecting a vital part? What are the reasons to "buy local" today?
5. Benjamin Franklin was enthusiastic about finding new useful plants, especially for nutrition. Today we know that food diversity is essential to the resilience of a food system. Is global trade a positive or negative force in promoting food diversity?

6. Wulf quotes Franklin as saying, “by cutting off our Trade, you have thrown us to *the Earth*, whence like *Antaeus* we shall rise yearly with fresh Strength and Vigour.” To “cut off” is a phrasal verb that means “to interrupt supply” or “isolate”. He was talking about Americans being isolated from foreign trade. Today, we are cut off by the Covid-19 pandemic. Can you interpret Franklin’s quote as if he were talking about our current situation?
7. Wulf writes, “America’s endless horizons, fertile soil and floral abundance became the perfect articulation of a distinct national identity – of a country that was young and strong.” Is this still America’s national identity? What landscape embodies Sicilian identity?
8. Wulf quotes Madison in saying that “humankind could not expect nature to be ‘made subservient to the use of man.’ Man, he believed, has to find a place within the ‘symmetry of nature’ without destroying it”. What academic terms would we use today to express the same concepts?
9. The first American politicians, as well as their contemporaries in Sicily, were all also farmers. What would American or Italian government be like today if the country were run by agronomists?
10. The optional reading this week describes the short-lived Sicilian Constitution of 1812. This time, the British promoted the adoption of a constitutional government in Sicily that was ultimately a failure. Norwich, a British author, concentrates on Lord Bentinck’s role. However, the leading Sicilian figures were landowners or agronomists such as Paolo Balsamo, Carlo Cottone, prince of Castelnuovo, Giuseppe Ventimiglia, prince of Belmonte and Louis Philippe I, the duke of Orléans and the last King of France. Each of these men contributed greatly to agricultural science and garden art. What traces of these men are left in Palermo’s landscape?