Renae Taylor

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“In the end, was Flora more optimistic or pessimistic about her work to start a labor movement during her Tour of France?”

Flora Tristan set out on a journey across France with the goal of speaking to the working class and spreading her ideas of organized labor unions. By undertaking this tour of France, Tristan hoped to create “a new kind of labor movement” that “would spread to all advanced countries” (124). With the establishment of a nonviolent “program for self-help […] with the hope of winning the cooperation of the more fortunate classes”, Tristan wished to improve the conditions of the working class (124). However, during her tour of France, Tristan struggled with getting local workers to understand and accept her ideals, frustrations she recounts in her travel diary. Despite these difficulties and the ridicule Tristan occasionally faced during her tour, she was more optimistic than pessimistic about her work to start a labor movement. While her optimism is illustrated throughout her travel diary, it is prominently displayed during her entry detailing her meeting with Vinçard.

In a prearranged meeting with a man named Vinçard and a group of workers, examples of Tristan’s pessimism and optimism can be seen. Tristan had arranged the gathering to read excerpts from her recently published *Worker’s Union.* At certain points during the meeting, she expresses optimism as the people generally “shared [her] opinion” as her book was read aloud and discussed, such as when she was discussing that workers were equal to kings in that they were all human (126-127). However, as the meeting progressed, Vinçard attacked the ideals expressed in her writing and declared them as being “still no more than utopian” (126). His usage of the word ‘utopian’ is used as an insult, implying that Tristan was naïve and foolish. Tristan remains calm despite his insult but expresses her frustration in this circumstance when she states, “Hopeless! He does not want to understand” (127). Her annoyance continues to build as the meeting progresses, to the point in which she describes one woman as being “as stupid as a goose” (127). Tristan leaves the meeting pessimistic, which is illustrated clearly when she criticizes individuals of the working class as being “unintelligent, conceited, stupid, ignorant, and insolent” (128). She expresses her frustration with her inability to get the workers to fully understand and embrace her ideals of worker equality and cooperation. In this instance, Tristan realizes that she would have to work harder than she thought to spread her ideas of a labor movement and is pessimistic at the prospect, lamenting about “what griefs and disappointments [she was] facing” despite all of her efforts (128).

However, after contemplating her experience in the meeting, Tristan reconciles with her initial disappointment and pessimism. She realizes that anyone, including members of the working class, have faults and that she would have to be more patient in explaining her ideas to them. Tristan reaches the conclusion that individuals are a “kind of manure with which one will be able to fertilize the young working-class generation” (128). She recognizes that by speaking to working class members, despite their faults, she can spread her ideals further if the people she talks to continue her discussion with their family and friends. In this way, by acting as a ‘gardener’ of society, Tristan would be able to achieve the labor movement she desires as long as she perseveres and continues to travel and speak with members of the working class. After this coming to this conclusion, Tristan resolves to “tell those workers the truth about their faults, their vices” and to hear what the workers have to say as well. By coming to know the workers personally and observing them “in all situations of life”, Tristan realizes that she would be able to understand them better and in turn understand how to communicate her ideas to them more efficiently (128). Although she realizes that her efforts would result in a “vast study that [she was] undertaking”, Tristan declares that the outcomes of her struggles “will reward [her] for [her] suffering” in the form of the labor movement she desires (128).

The progression of her views in this example illustrates that Tristan was more optimistic about her work as this pattern is repeated throughout her diary. Although she was initially pessimistic and frustrated by her encounter in the meeting, Tristan reconciles with these negative emotions by contemplating and devising better ways to speak to the people so that they may understand her. Her tour of France also reflects this change of pessimism to optimism. Although Tristan was often stressed and discouraged during instances of her travels, to the point in which she becomes ill with fatigue, she emphasizes her determination to continue speaking to the workers in order to spread her idea of labor unions. Tristan believed that by engaging in dialogue with the people, she was “enlighten[ing] and enliven[ing] the ignorant population” with her “great regenerative” idea of a labor movement (129). Tristan used this belief to sustain herself through tumultuous times during her tour of France and remained optimistic, realizing that she “would very much like to continue this tour of France” despite all of her hardships (133).

I pledge that I have neither received nor given unauthorized assistance during the completion of this work. Renae Taylor

Works Cited

Flora Tristan. *Utopian Feminist.* Translated by Doris and Paul Beik. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993.