

Carsten Jensen - Crisis as a form of life

Do you remember the Monty Python movie *Life of Brian* in which the protagonist is followed everywhere by an enthusiastic crowd who believes him to be the new Messiah? In a final attempt to get rid of them Brian tells his pursuers to stop behaving like a flock of sheep.

“You are all individuals,” he shouts.

“We are all individuals!” they shout back behaving exactly like a flock of sheep.

Only a small lonely voice objects: “I am not...”

Brian tries again: “You are all different!” he shouts.

“We are all different,” they shout back.

And again there is that little dissenting voice: “I am not...”

Hearing that, the crowd looks around eager to lynch the dissenter if only he can be found in the mass of lookalikes.

It is of course a wonderful scene. Not only because it shows how individualism easily becomes the new conformism. But also because it introduces that unforeseen element, the man who thinks he has no personality at all and thereby becomes the only individual voice in a choir of anonymity.

It is the Polish-German sociologist Zygmunt Bauman who recounts the scene in his book *Liquid life*. He speculates that the only way to be unique in a society that celebrates the individualism of its citizens is to efface your uniqueness.

And then he adds: “If you can manage such a feat, that is: and if you can resign yourself to facing its (utterly unpleasant) consequences...”

The fact is of course that during most of history that is exactly what we have managed to do as a species. In any society governed by tradition the smallest act was dictated to you by patterns long ago established by your ancestors. Religion demanded the same thing of you: Abandon your precious I. The 20th century that claimed to be secular gave birth to totalitarian mass-movements promising to do what religion had previously done and relieve the individual of the apparently unbearable burden of individualism. They all took something away from you but not without giving you something in return: a secure and unshakeable identity that you could share with others. There is such a thing as the temptation of losing your individualism, and historically it has proven a much stronger temptation than one might think.

More than a decade ago I travelled the world for a whole year and after having met a lot of people belonging to all sorts of cultures and social classes I developed a banal little philosophy of my own dividing the people I had met in two categories: Those who believed that what distinguished man was what he had in common with all other men. That no matter how different in cultural background and outlook we happen to be, there will always be common ground on which we could meet. The second category of people consisted of those who believed that what distinguished man, made up his individuality so to speak, was exactly that which made him different from everybody else.

The first category would always meet me, the stranger, not with a closed fist ready to attack or defend themselves but with an open hand stretched forward in greeting. The second category would measure me up and greet me in a distanced way if they greeted me at all. I was not one of them.

Now you might think that the first category were confirmists, not caring much for individualism whereas the second category were very much into proclaiming their individuality. The opposite is the case.

With Enlightenment two ideas that do not at first seem compatible were born simultaneously and are actually twin-creatures. One is that each human being is a unique individual with his own rights. The other is that no racial, cultural or historical barrier is so insurmountable high that it can divide us from each other forever: man is an universal creature, and the forces that unite us are much stronger than those which separate us. These two ideas, the one of the uniqueness of our individuality, and the other of the universality of our values and hopes, are one and the same, the one the consequence of the other. So the people who greeted me with an outstretched hand came to me convinced that in spite of any individual, cultural or religious differences we still shared some common ground.

The people who eyed me with diffidence thought the opposite, not because they believed that one individual should necessarily look at another with mistrust but because they thought that the cultural and historical barriers between us were insurmountable. Their identity was firmly rooted in their history and culture, in what distinguished them from everybody else. It was the identity of a fortress from which you could look out at the enemy, that is those who were not like you. This sounds like the identity proclaimed by ethnic or nationalist groups or religious dogmatists but it isn't necessarily so. You can also find this mentality in modern sub-cultural groups such as bikers, Goths, punks, lesbian or gay communities, who militantly celebrate their difference.

It is a way of thinking that is much more widespread than one realises: you find it not only among hard-core nationalists, you also find it among their sworn enemies, the so-called multiculturalists, whose eternal preaching of the message of tolerance bears no resemblance to the original intentions of the philosophers of the Enlightenment who first introduced us to the concept of tolerance and intended it as a passionate way of engaging with those with whom you do not agree. In the moral relativism of the multiculturalists, all cultures are equally good and the message of tolerance is this: please leave me alone. The vision of the multiculturalists is a society seen as multitude of narrowly defined communities – you are welcome to call them tribes, because that is what they are – living peacefully side by side and never engaging with one another, locking themselves away behind the prison-like walls of a secure identity. It is a society of cultural fortresses in which the inhabitants are too preoccupied with their individual roots to meet the challenges of a forever changing world in which the future, if we are to have one, can only be created, if we all cooperate.

There is a critical cliché of the modern world: that it is so seething with rampant individualism of a variety hard to distinguish from egotism, that we have fatally lost our sense of community and of mutual responsibility for the society we live in.

It is true that the market caters for a shallow individualism, and ironically you can buy its uniform in the shape of ever-changing fashions designed to signal your membership of one or other of the many subcultures.

If you turn to the political scene the picture changes completely. Hardly anywhere will you find appeals to individualism or egotism. Modern politics has changed into what sociologists call identity politics. Instead of presenting the interests of various social groups the politicians will offer the voters an identity, not an individual one, but one that offers access to a community whose doors are its most important element, because not everyone gets a key. The community's main-attraction is its power to exclude. Where no borders were previously to be found, it creates new ones, straight through a town, along a street, in the middle of a family. You find your identity when you find your enemy, and you can only identify with the like-minded who share your habits and culture.

Identity is often referred to in the singular, my identity, but it is always intended in the plural. Identity in this sense is always a group-identity.

So I don't think that a diagnosis of our present calamities that decries egotistical individualism and the corresponding lack of solidarity among society's individual members is correct. I would rather say that we are torn between a market-related individualism that is

shallow, forever fluid and unaccomplished, and a longing for community in the most narrow-minded definition of the word: the community of the clones.

Culture is by definition bigger than any individual, and has come to encompass the whole notion of education in the classic sense. By education I don't mean training for a specific job and acquiring the skills that go along with it: I mean acquainting yourself with the best that humanity has produced, be it within philosophy, music, literature, arts or science, thus transforming yourself from an individual with a particular outlook to an individual with a much wider, more universal outlook.

But in recent years the word culture has undergone a most astonishing transformation. When you use the word culture today you are thinking of roots and the question: where do I come from as if the answer to that question would automatically answer the next question: who am I? Your identity seems to be dictated by destiny, not by your own free choice. The randomness of your birthplace decides everything, including your so-called culture which is not something you acquire through hard work but is handed down to you by birth as a gift that is quite hard to differentiate from the ball and chain that prevents a prisoner from moving.

When you are told about your roots you are not told that you grew in the same universal soil that also produced palm-trees, oaks and the most exotic plants. No, you grew in your own little flowerpot and your outlook must be accordingly limited. So culture means going from the universal to the particular, from the broad-minded to the narrow-minded until you are ready to step forward as a true Dane or a true Norwegian.

I don't know if you are familiar with the word "canon" which in this context does not refer to guns but to a list of artistic works that you must make yourself familiar with if you want to consider yourself a well-educated person. A couple of years ago the Danish cultural minister Brian Mikkelsen, created such a canon. You might have thought that this was put together to teach the Danes about all the fantastic things that had been achieved by artists and thinkers all over world, after all, we live in a era called globalization, or that at least he aimed at presenting the best of Western civilisation. But no: the intention of the canon which focused only on works by Danish writers was to show to the Muslim immigrants living in Denmark what a superior culture could achieve. The muslims themselves according to the culture minister represented an inferior culture.

Recently, I heard of a canon that frankly interested me much more. In 2006 the chief of police in Neza, one of the toughest areas of Mexico City, Jorge Amador, decided that the members of his force needed to become better citizens, so he gave them a reading list

featuring such writers as Octavio Paz, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry and Edgar Allan Poe and many others. Please notice that among the writers there are several non-Mexican names. The chief of police is not inspired by Brian Mikkelsen. It is not a Mexican canon Jorge Amador has made. He doesn't want his policemen to feel like Mexicans. He is thinking of something else. He wants to give them a wider experience of the world. "A police officer must be worldly, and books enrich people's experience indirectly," he said. He also said that in order to put their lives at risk policemen needed deep convictions and in books they could discover lives lived with a similar commitment. Please notice something else: he does not suggest to his policemen that they should be reading books in which policemen are the protagonists, though we all know that there is a whole genre dedicated to that. He is not looking for the easy, predictable effect of recognition, nor does he want his policemen to identify with their colleagues.

Jorge Amador, the police chief of a tough, rundown neighbourhood in Mexico City, might not have read Immanuel Kant but what he proposed was in the tradition of Kantian thinking. The virtue of literature, claimed the German philosopher, is that it teaches you to put yourself in the place of others.

Jorge Amador was making his canon for universal man.

I don't know if you have ever thought about the origins of the word "individual". It comes from Latin and means that which is indivisible, that cannot be divided. Humanity can be divided in so many ways, in various cultures and countries. A society consists of classes and hierarchies with various levels, it can be divided into groups and classes, but with the individual you have reached the end of dividing. The individual is the smallest unit of any society. The problem today is probably that the word individual is no longer the correct term for what we are. The identities on offer, whether they be those of rampant individualism or the narrow communities of ethnic, religious or national origins don't seem able to define in any satisfying way all that we are. There will always be something leftover and so we don't have one but several identities living together in uneasy coexistence where we can't seem to make up our mind which one is the determining one and if we finally manage to put one of them on the throne of our I, there still seems to be something arbitrary about our choice. We have in other words done what the very word that defines us, individual, says we can not do. We have divided ourselves. We are not individuals: we are, if such a word can exist: individuals: those that can be divided.

Is divisible man still universal man, or is he rather universal man fallen apart in fragments, or if you want to phrase it in a positive way: universal man not yet come together, like a puzzle where the single pieces are still waiting to be assembled?

In 2006 I published a novel called *We, the drowned*, a big sprawling story spanning the lives of four generations of sailors from the little town of Marstal, including three wars, innumerable deaths by drowning and a bit of love. There was a particular theme that interested me in the novel, that of fatherlessness, since it found a personal echo in my own childhood. My father was a sailor, too, and children of sailors learn to take their fathers absence from the family for granted, almost as if it was a natural condition. Not that the father has necessarily perished out there on the ever dangerous sea, even though that was often the case in previous centuries, but more simply because he is often away years at the time and so incapable of fulfilling the traditional role of the father.

In many ways Marstal was a functioning matriarchat, the women apparently taking it on themselves to play the part of the absent parent as well. The astonishing result was that boys brought up in families dominated by the female presence turned out to be just as tough as boys brought up in the more traditional way under the disciplining hand of a father. I did notice though that in the wake of The First World War where a high number of sailors from the town were killed there was a remarkable flourishing of boy-gangs that continuously battled each other in increasingly brutal fights and as one man looking back on his childhood said to me: it was a miracle that no one was killed. I could not help feeling that the violence was the means in which these fatherless boys brought each other up preparing for the rough life at sea.

Fatherlessness is a term often used in psychological and sociological diagnosis'es of present society. I was aware of course that there was a difference in the fatherlessness described in my novel and the present fatherlessness. In the ancient sailor's communities the fathers might be physical absent but they were still present as role-models. Their sons would follow in their footsteps and become sailors themselves. They had no alternative and so the fatherly authority remained in place whether he himself was there or not. The modern fatherlessness is of different kind and does not concern his physical presence but his ability to act as a role-model. There is an increasing number of children being brought up by single mothers, but in the great majority of modern families the father is more physical present and less emotional distant than in any previous generations. The problem is of course that he is no longer a rolemodel. In

a rapidly changing society his knowledge and experience is quickly made obsolete. You cannot copy him. Following in his footsteps is a sure recipe for failure. You have to invent your own life. That is the message of modern fatherlessness: Freedom, but also the deep, existential insecurity that always seems to accompany freedom.

And I could not help feeling that that existential insecurity must also have been known to the sailors of bygone eras. There must have been times when they questioned the very meaning of their lives. They had confidence in their own skills as sailors but being realistic they also knew that these skills had their limits when a storm was raging. They had seen again and again their fathers, brothers, sons, uncles and cousins perish at sea and they must have asked themselves: is that what it all comes down to, all the hardship, the self-punishing discipline, the lack of a normal family-life: a death by drowning in the darkest depths of the ocean?

In the novel it is not the men that asks these questions though. It is the women and so the novel's center of gravity shifts, from the men's world to the women's as the women start to rebel against the life imposed on them by the ever absent sailors: the loss of family-members, the anxious waiting that might go on for years. But this rebellion also changes the women. They are forced to take on more masculine roles. It is the time of The Second World War with its dramatic upheaval in the relationship between the sexes. The novel ends with a boy being born at sea, in the midst of one of the many battles of The North Atlantic. He grows up having not one father, but seventeen from as many nations.

More or less at the same time that my novel was published another book appeared that immediately caught my interest since it seemed to be concerned with the same subject. This was a book by Danish historian Henrik Jensen and its title was *The fatherless society*.

Henrik Jensen tries to diagnose a big shift in Western civilization from what he calls a society based on duty to a society based on rights. The traditional fatherly values, such as duty, responsibility, hierarchy, guilt, obedience, rationality, are lost in favour of traditional motherly values such as tenderness, care, immediate satisfaction of needs, sensitivity, creativity. In the eyes of Henrik Jensen this diagnosis is simultaneously a doomsday-prophecy. No society based on motherly values alone can survive but is headed for collapse. Without authority no identity can be formed and so society will fall apart in the rampant idea that human beings have no duties, but only rights. Fatherlessness means the end of civilization as we know it.

One immediate objection to the book is that Henrik Jensen has a very stereotypical, even limited idea of motherhood and its values. An even stronger objection is this: why is it that

this immense social upheaval in the nineteen sixties, where women became part of the workforce, the sexual revolution took place, the pill was introduced and militant feminism emerged has left no trace on them nor modified their female characteristics in the slightest? How were unspoilt motherly values able to emerge triumphant in the moment that the fatherly values collapsed?

Henrik Jensen notices, rightly so, I think, that these two cultures, that of duty and that of rights, are simultaneously present inside each one of us. He wants this conflict out in the open in the shape of what he ominously labels “a cultural struggle”, a battle right to the death from which only one of the parties can emerge victorious. But why does this presence of two different cultures necessarily spells war? Why can't they co-exist in peace, the sense of duty balancing the demand for rights, fatherly values enriching motherly values and the other way round making us if not more whole human beings at least human beings with a much wider emotional range, richer in experience and knowledge of the ways of the world? Why is such a thing as female authority inconceivable? During the course of history our character have already undergone dramatic changes. How come that we have now reached the end of the road and are faced with the grim alternative of going back in our tracks or facing the collapse of civilization?

I would like to state that I do not believe that man is a creature who is forever changeable. This idea was promoted by the anthropologists of the 20th century, among them Margaret Mead, who came back from faraway places in the Pacific announcing that man was not biology but all history: women behaved with dramatic difference according to place, history, environment and culture, the genders were not a biological given. Her research inspired the French feminist Simone de Beauvoir who turned the discoveries of anthropology into a battle-cry for freedom announcing that “You are not born as a woman. A woman is something you become. “

The totalitarian movements of the 20th century, ambitiously wanting to create not only a new social order but also a so-called “new man”, were also attracted to this idea of the total changeability of man that in their hands turned out to be truly dangerous as they trespassed into the inner life of their citizens trying to control their very minds.

We all have, I think, an interior borderline, undefined as it may be, that must not be crossed, if something valuable inside us is not to die. We are capable of change. Our identities are not a destiny dictated by biology or culture, we have the freedom to choose, but there is change and then there is too much change and the balance between them is always precarious.

No, we don't need to backtrack in order to solve the problems of civilization, but we do need to proceed with care.

I recently came across a book the title of which proved irresistible to me knowing that I had been invited to give a speech at this conference of family-therapists. The book is written by the French philosopher Luc Ferry and its title is *Familles je vous aime, Families, I love you*. Even though Luc Ferry declares himself a right-winger and served two years as minister of education under president Jacques Chirac his view is the opposite of Henrik Jensen. He celebrates the new family-patterns emerging ever since love became the basis of marriage as the most enriching and dignified ever in the history of man. Not only is there love, there is also the discovery of the child as a human being in its own right. He sees it as a real revolution, the most profound and important ever, a revolution of the sphere of intimacy with wide-ranging consequences for the rest of society. He does not see the individualist, that favourite target of moralists, as an egotist in search of splendid isolation. The individualist is not a lover of loneliness, on the contrary, he is passionately in search of company and as a consequence we have become a much more caring society.

The family takes on many forms. Apart from the standard-family there is single-parents families, lesbians or gay-couples living together, some of them raising children. Ferry sees this as proofs of the vitality of the modern family, not as symptoms of its falling apart as is so often done.

We are no longer willing to die for God, the fatherland or any other abstract institution dictating us a one-dimensional identity. Then, what are we willing to die for? This is a crucial question, in the eyes of Luc Ferry. If we hold no value dearer than our own life we live in a nihilist and morally relativistic society that as a consequence will not be able to hold together but fall apart in anarchy. This is exactly the accusation in Henrik Jensens book: Nothing is sacred to us. Please notice that in English and in French the two words, sacred and sacrifice, are closely connected. To prove that you regard something as sacred you must be willing to sacrifice yourself for it. Luc Ferry thinks there is something that is sacred to us: each other. From waiting in the wings as spectators in awe of gods and kings we, the ordinary people, have finally moved centerstage.

Luc Ferry, being not only a philosopher but also French, provides few if any examples of his thesis. But reading it I could not help feeling that it had a deep resonance in my own life. When I became a father I made that one decision: that I would not be as distant as the father that I grew up with and that certainly was not only the most important but also best decision of my life, enriching it in wonderful and unpredictable ways.

I will never be able to stop once I start counting the blessings watching my daughter grow up, so I will instead quote another writer. My choice might be quite unexpected, the British writer J. G. Ballard, who since the sixties has produced a long row of controversial and provocative novels exploring the darker side of the middleclass-imagination with its secret love for violence bordering on the self-destructive. He recently published his memoirs, the title of which, *Miracles of life* does not refer to his artistic achievements but to his three children that he brought up singlehandedly after the early death of their mother.

“I think of myself as extremely lucky. The years I spent as a parent of my young children were the richest and happiest I have ever known... My children were at the center of my life, circled at a distance by my writing... A short story, a chapter of a novel, would be written in the time between the ironing of a school tie, serving up the sausage and mash, and watching Blue Peter. I am certain that my fiction is all the better for that.”

And here comes the sentence I particularly love: “Some fathers make good mothers, and I hope I was one of them.”

Have you ever noticed the confusion you might occasionally feel when you introduce yourself to a stranger? If you are travelling abroad you might introduce yourself as a Norwegian or a Dane. If you attend a conference like this you will present yourself as family-therapist or in my case as a writer. Arriving at a meeting at the school of your children your identity is that of a parent. On election day you are either leftwing or rightwing. In each and every one of these cases you will probably feel that the identity in the name of which you represent yourself is only partial and in no way a satisfying description of what you are. What about your sexual orientation for example?

You can't tell everything about yourself in one go, unless you are strongly religious and feel that when you have presented yourself as a Christian or a Muslim you have said all that needs to be said. I have only met one person who tried to present the plurality of identities that made up his personality in the opening greeting: “Hello,” he would say, “I am a homosexual writer from the Danish island of Bornholm.”

If you give one identity priority over all others and claim that being human means to have only one single identity you not only diminish us all you also make the world a much more dangerous place to live in, says Amartya Sen, an Indian economist and Nobel Prize-winner in his book *Identity and violence*. “The main hope of harmony in our troubled world lies in the plurality of our identities,” he continues. The point for Amartya Sen is not whether you can choose to be whoever you want to be. Of course that is impossible. The point is whether we

do indeed have the freedom to choose between alternative identities or create a combination of identities and perhaps more importantly freedom regarding what priority to give to the various identities we may simultaneously have. The problem is of course that if you have a religious identity of the orthodox variety it tends to suppress all the other identities that make up your personality.

I think it is no coincidence that Amartya Sen is an Indian coming from a continent where different religions and cultures have been forced to coexist for centuries, in some cases milleniums. Another Indian Pavan K. Varma in his book *Being Indian* gives the following description of the Indian character: “The mistake one should never make is to accept the aimable Indian as a monolith. He is a most well-adjusted split personality, capable of living simultaneously and effortlessly on two mutually opposed planes. His mind is like a chest of drawers – never a single cupboard; each drawer can be a world unto itself, and can be pulled out, without reference to the others, in response to a given situation.”

This view of the world might as its background have special historical circumstances but its message is universal. So what do you think is the richest personality: the one which has room for one, and only one idea of what it means to be human, or the one who has room for many?

You might when you encounter the firm handshake and look into the passionate eyes of a religious believer experience a moment of envy confronted with the strength of his convictions. You might feel that you as a person are indecisive, vague and full of doubt, maybe even a representative of a civilization in decline, but don't forget: the man in front of you only appears strong because he has reduced his identity to one and only one dimension.

So who is really strong and who is weak?

When you bring up children you live through your own childhood once again. You see the failings of your parents and you decide that you are not going to repeat them. In many ways your ideas of upbringing are all about trying to make up for past suffering and then the day comes when you realize that maybe your parents had exactly the same ambition. They, too, tried to give you a more happy childhood than the one they had, and the tragic irony of it is that you think they failed.

My grandmother was a very authoritarian person who from early on tried to break my mother's will and never gave her reason to feel the slightest confidence in herself. My mother tried to do the opposite with me. We were close and talked about everything like equals as if from the age of ten I was an adult, too. In some ways we became too close. My mother confided in me all her many anxieties, above all her fatal lack of confidence in herself until I

was overwhelmed with the burden of her troubled soul.

I decided that it was not that kind of intimacy I wanted with my daughter.

One day she asked me: “Dad, when you cry, does your nose fill up with snot, too.”

“Yes,” I said, “I always have to blow my nose when I cry.”

“But you never cry,” she said.

To me this was a confirmation: yes, I had accomplished what I wanted, not that I wanted her to think that I was incapable of emotional outbursts or grief, but I did not want to burden her with an insight into the workings of an adult mind that she was not yet ready for. I wanted her to see me as an emotionally stable person that she could rely on until her own personality was formed.

While we get some things right as parents, we do other things wrong. This is a basic fact of life and if you do not learn it right away you will read it one day in the eyes of your children or hear it directly from their mouth. You will see no truer mirror of yourself than that presented by your children. It will show you everyone of your faults and all you can hope for is forgiveness.

Once you are a parent your whole relationship with the future changes, not just the future of your own life, or the society you live in, but that of the planet. It is as if you realize that a change of the right of property has taken place: the planet no longer belongs to you, it belongs to your offspring. That is of course why generation gaps can have such an impact when it changes into the rebellion of the young against the old: deep down in their hearts the older generation knows the battle can not be won: time is not on their side.

The last memorable generation gap of any real importance was the one that occurred in the 1960ties. It has since served as a role-model giving us the wrong impression that a generation doesn't really have any distinct characteristics, no will or vision of its own, if it doesn't rebel. This of course is not the case.

Listening to my daughter talk I do feel though that a new rebellion is on the way, but it is as different from that of the sixties as can be imagined. “We want the world and we want it now,” Jim Morrison of The Doors sang, the two keywords being “want” and “now”. It was a hedonistic revolution focused on the now that announced itself.

“Will I live to have children – or even grandchildren?” my daughter asks, an unusual worry for a twelve year old, you might think, but she is not thinking of her own personal future. She is thinking of that of the planet. Her question is not unreasonable giving the speed with which the ice is melting, the oceans and the air turning hotter, all scientific predictions on global

warming being on a daily basis overtaken by events. A storm is gathering and those in power do not seem to care or understand what is evident to a child: our future on this planet has come under threat.

When a child asks this kind of questions the time has come for history taking a new course. The new rebellion will not be hedonistically focused on the now, it will have the future as its horizon, though whether it will be puritanical or not we cannot yet say. But it will have a profound effect on our identity as human beings. Once again we will go through unforeseen changes that will alter our relationship with each other, including that of work and nature.

That brief period in history when you could focus on your own private life when you envisioned the future is over. If faced with the ever more dramatic climate-changes we do not learn to think in new, less individualistic ways we are indeed without a future.

One thing will remain constant though. We as a species are that particular animal who can never resign itself to bare survival. We will always need that indefinable extra in our lives that some call freedom and some call happiness, some just call meaning.

I will end my talk with a little anecdote that once again has my daughter as the protagonist. I will not interpret it for you or add any deeper meaning to it. That is entirely up to you.

This took place during one of the marathon-visits we occasionally pay to Copenhagen Tivoli. In a small, very much needed break, from hanging with our heads down in a rollercoaster quite accurately called The Demon we were having lunch in a restaurant enjoying the colourful sights of the crowded amusement park when my daughter being in one of her thoughtful moods asked me a question.

“Dad, do you think the world would be a better place if it was ruled by women?”

Without a moment’s hesitation I answered yes.

She looked at the rollercoaster whose passengers were crying out loud in ecstasy.

“In case women ruled the world,” she said, “would Tivoli also be a more fun place?”

I will not tell you what I answered.