

**LIV
KRISTIN
HOLMBERG**

-

**DER
LETZTE
MENSCH**

Composer: Stefan Thorsson

Curator: Maria Veie

THE LAST MESSIAH

BY PETER WESSEL ZAPFFE

(English version originally published in Janus #9, 1933)

One night in long bygone times, man awoke and saw *himself*.

He saw that he was naked under cosmos, homeless in his own body. All things dissolved before his testing thought, wonder above wonder, horror above horror unfolded in his mind.

Then woman too awoke and said it was time to go and slay. And he fetched his bow and arrow, a fruit of the marriage of spirit and hand, and went outside beneath the stars. But as the beasts arrived at their waterholes where he expected them of habit, he felt no more the tiger's bound in his blood, but a great psalm about the brotherhood of suffering between everything alive.

That day he did not return with prey, and when they found him by the next new moon, he was sitting dead by the waterhole.

I am a barren woman. This is not something we talk about very often. It seems like I am not allowed to. It is too uncomfortable. Whether I was doomed, or whether I chose it as the women in the following texts, I still don't know.

I remember a conversation with my brother in law, sitting on the decks of a small ferry, a short travel from the cabin of my ex-husbands small resort. Both of us were in our late twenties, I think I had married a year or two earlier. When it came up that I didn't want any children, he instantly replied "that's a bit late to say!" I was stunned. So by marrying I had kind of promised to give birth? I remember thinking that my husband knew this very well, and I was surprised that a ring could make people forget who I was, or expect things that was highly unlikely. Nobody had any reason to think of me as the "mothering type". But since I married, they just assumed I would give birth. Even radical friends of mine admitted to this view. It surprised me, because I never imagined myself to have children.

My husband left me when I was 28. I was at work, and when I came home he was gone without a note or nothing. I cried the rest of the year. A year later a tumour the size of an orange was discovered in my uterine. They told me that the treatment would burn it all away. I asked them if I could remove an egg, but this would diminish my chances for survival. I still remember that I didn't want to have kids even when I was married, so why should this matter now? Unfortunately it does. It seems like being a barren woman makes you half person.

A year ago, September 14th 2013, Liv Kristin Holmberg challenged "Non-Mothers" to write about their choice. By posting the request online she received fifteen texts by Scandinavian women. Six months later, I was introduced to her. We had never met before, but several colleagues had told me about her work. Later she wrote to me about a project that might fit for Berlin. I was stunned, again. She didn't know I was barren, she came to me, what I did was just to sharpen the edges. I am just another of the Non-Mothers, not pretending to be anonymous, or neutral, as I keep asking myself what she asked the other Non-Mothers: **Are we obliged to give birth, to create life?**

And then it all started. I was “inhuman”, “insensitive”, “unfeminine”, “selfish”, “self-centered”. People said: “She, poor thing, she could not have children, so she became an artist.” “Hm, maybe she’s aggressive, just thinking about her career, she could not have children, hm”. That is how it started. Strangely enough, in Scandinavia, where feminism is so strong.

Dear child whom I will never get to know,

I think of you sometimes. I wonder if you’d turn out to be adventurous like him or if you would be more skeptical like me? Would you get his wonderful hair, curly and dark or my blonde and thin hair? What kind of music would you like? What decisions would you make in life? Would I support you fully or would I turn out to be a controlling mother full of anxiety? Who would break your heart for the first time? Would you come to me and talk about the pain? I hope so. I know I would be able to answer since I’ve been there too.

In my dreams you are the perfect child. Daring, self-confident, talented and adventurous. However, I will never get to know.

It hasn’t been easy, I want you to know that. The road up until now was rocky and long. I’ve been questioned so many times and I have to defend myself and my decision - not sometimes but always and everywhere. I started to even question it myself since it seemed so provocative and wrong.

You might think “but it takes two”. My dear, the truth is that he has never been questioned or even asked why he doesn’t want to become a father. He has not even once in his life had to explain why. I wonder why that is? To him it was such an easy thing that he wouldn’t even call it a decision and to me it was almost like a revolution. Not because of what I felt or knew was right, but because of what I knew the world around me felt.

Women close to me have said that when a child is born, a mother’s heart is no longer her own. My dear, I can truly say I own my own heart. My heart isn’t cold and egoistic just because you don’t exist. It’s actually filled with love and compassion.

I still remember the moment when I knew I would never get to hold you in my arms. I cried. Not of sorrow, but it was a cry of relief. I felt whole again.

I had always known deep in my heart, but at that very moment I just knew I was ready to tell the world. The world with all its expectations and images of what every woman want and should be like. There and then I knew I was ready. I said the words out loud to myself. They sounded wonderful. “I will never bare a child, I will never be a mother.”

I hope I’ll be able to return to that place one day, that I can sit down on that very rock and still feel certain, happy and confident about my life. A life lived without, but in some way also with, you.

I am 31 years, and I am in a relationship. I have no desire for having children.

And that is not something I think just right now, I know I will never want to have children. I simply have no desire to have children, neither now, nor later in life.

Perhaps there are complex reasons behind this attitude, perhaps it is quite simple. If I believe that there are complex reasons for this, I look back at the time when I was a teenager. At that time I had three younger half sisters- and brothers. Today I have a good relationship with all of them. But when I was 14, it was not fun to have siblings. My older sister and I used to be the most important in the world for my father. But now, being a spectator of his new family, my father felt so far away from me, and the jealousy I felt towards my half-siblings was intense and painful.

Dad and mom are divorced. My mom is divorced again. And I have also been married and then divorced. I've generally had a good childhood, but having divorced parents still affect me, by grief and loss. I felt responsible for my parents' happiness, I have seen them both cry many times because of me and my older sister. Dad cried because he missed us, mom cried because she was sad because we wanted to be a little more together with our father (a little more than one weekend per month).

The man I'm together with now, I want to be together with him for the rest of my life.

But according to my experience I know that there is no guarantee. The statistics are not on my side. I would not like to bring children into this world and run the risk that they are exposed to the same grief that I experienced as a child and young adult.

And I have mentioned the feeling of jealousy before, and because I can relate to it and have no idea how it feels to have your own child that you love more than anything in the world, I fear that I'm going to be very jealous of the child that takes the attention of the man in my life away from me.

And if I allow myself to think about the more simple, straightforward reasons: I am happy, I am satisfied and I lack nothing. I have a husband whom I love, who loves me, and I want to share the rest of my life with him and experience the world with him. We have a financial flexibility that allows us to enjoy life, both planned and spontaneous. The idea of being responsible for one or more children sounds more like an obstacle for the life I enjoy living. When people around me are trying to convince me and say "it must be nice to have children and grandchildren around you when you get old etc." That is really not a good reason for me to have children. I need to really want it, sharing fifty years together with my kids, I can not just have children because I want someone to take care of me when I'm old.

I know that as human beings we often change our minds. But in this case, I neither believe nor want that to happen.

I do not think people are able to distinguish between nature and culture. It is quite natural to have children. It lies deep within all of us to want to reproduce ourselves. That is why we exist. Earth worms reproduce themselves, plants reproduce themselves. And it's written in the Bible: "Go out and" ... something ... "multiply." No doubt that mankind did this. It's too many people on this planet. It is true that it is very deeply rooted in people ... not in me though ... that you want to have children. But people are not able to really consider: Do I live in such a way that fits to have children? Is the society I'm living in a good place to raise children? Do I like the pedagogical principles that is being used in kindergartens? Do I like how the school is organized? Do I like the youth culture that a child will be a part of? Most people are not thinking about this. They just say, "Pregnant. Fun. A new baby! "



Do I have the right to create another human being? To press it, push it into this reality? Without asking her. Just create and push the life forward. Do I have the right? And for my own sake, am I glad to be in this world? I know, it is a meaningless question. I am here. I am pressed into life. From nothing. To everything. We can be everything. Even to create you. Within me I carry the opportunity for your life. I can look at myself this way: my life is a possibility for your life. I carry this possibility inside of me, every day, every night, every time I make love. There you are. The yet unknown. My life as your life. The child. Your soft skin touches my skin. You eat of my body. We share the life source. Can I choose your life? You, who need me to be alive? How can I not choose you? I need you to be alive.

“ It’s just that I feel that the motherhood has subsumed my whole being and has wiped out all my individuality. I love my children dearly, and devote myself to them, but my life with them is like wading through thick mud. I can’t see any part of the former, efficient, competent me. I feel a sense of loss of myself. **”**

Why should I give birth?

Should I give birth because
I can or
because I one day might
regret I didn't?

I'm confused.

Are these all the arguments I've got?
What about lust or eager,
don't you feel this longing child-need,
or at least a tiny little
baby-feeding-body-hurt?

-

What does it mean to regret? Why do I think the possibility of regretting, when I don't want it at this moment. Because I have plenty of time? I don't have plenty, but some years are still plenty enough before I really must make up my mind. What or who tells me maybe I will regret – my family, my friends, the society, my body or my own rational thinking? Is a potential regretting my best argument?

Of course I'm also curious. Because my body can: How would my body deal with this.. thing? It has a womb. It has a hole. I have a hole inside myself. What am I supposed to fill my cave with, if not an embryo growing, becoming not only a copy of myself but also a recognition of nature's power? I'm also nature, I can give birth!

But then, what if not – what if my body actually can't? I haven't tried, I have never become pregnant, I'm 34 years old, I don't know if my body can. So.. Should I therefore try, is that the reason I should get pregnant; to see if it's actually true what they say about female bodies?



“That she bears children is not
a woman's significance.

But that she bears herself, that
is her supreme and risky fate.”



To give birth and everything has, of course, something to do with biology. It is just there and it is very strong. It is very strong. In many ways it is as strong as sexuality. But .. there is a lot of work with children. I think one of the reasons I didn't get any children is because I was afraid to lose my freedom. I really love my freedom. I could probably have children if I didn't love my freedom so much. But now I feel I have had all the freedom a human being can wish for.

The anxiety makes it impossible. My death anxiety. The terror that grabs my neck at night times. The endless fear of being alone. To be alone forever. To create life, it is also to create death. Others death. I carry you, and I can create your death, your anxiety, your eternal vulnerability as a human being. How can I do such a thing? How to legitimize it? To create you, yet unknown, the most beautiful human being of all, you who I already love, and then one day, when you look into my eyes, in anxiety, and I then will have to answer you: I do not know why we are here. I do not know why you're here. I do not know how this will end. My beloved daughter, the only thing I know is that we will die. We are born to die. Most people forget this. Most people learn to save themselves by artificially limiting the content of consciousness. Or they rely on God. The light. The light that rests in your eyes, when you love, when you dream, and when you pray. Can I take this from you? Can I remove you from God's light? Remove you from your first kiss? Your first taste of the ocean, your first touch of shimmering crystal snow? Can I remove you from all this? My beloved, unborn, who is me, the future me, it is the fear of the end and insight in the impossible of being that makes you an eternal unknown.

I never wanted to have children. When I was little, I said to my friend that it is much better to have a dog. I do not remember why, but I remember I was absolutely sure about that I would not like to have children.

I have a small family, not a nice, big family with lots of aunts and uncles and children swarming around. I'm also sure that I wouldn't be a good mother. I am an impatient type with much temper, and I like to spend time alone. I would probably have trouble giving the child things that "all the other kids have", because I think there is a problem with the materialism and consumerism in society today.

My opinion did not change with time. I found out that there are too many people on this planet. We are struggling to feed all the people in the world. Why should we create more human beings? And why can we not instead adopt a child who does not have parents? I think the world is going in the wrong direction, and I would not wish the children to experience this. And the environmental problems become bigger and bigger due to human activity - how is it on earth in 50 years? I am a pessimist. I've never understood why people have this great desire to lead their genes on.

I've had two boyfriends who broke up with me because I didn't want children. They begged me to change my mind. One of them said: "I can take care of the child, you just have to give birth". He really really wanted to have children. The other said: "I want to have kids when I am 28!" Then he was 26 and I was 30, but I still had no desire to have children. He ended the relationship, and the year after he became a father. Now I am very happy for my decision, I can do whatever I want, wake up late during the weekend, be spontaneous. And now I also have a boyfriend who does not want children.

Some treat me as if there is something wrong with me since I don't want children. In my family I have been discriminated in a case about inheritance because I don't have children. A family member, for example, said that she wouldn't regard me and instead give the inheritance to my brother's children. I think that's unfair. Considering the time I spend taking care of her just because I don't have children. My brother has never time to take care of her.

Sometimes children are completely invisible to me, I see only the adults. Afterwards I feel like the vicious children hater. But sometimes they are impossible to

ignore. When I visit my brother, he has never time to sit down for a coffee, he is so busy with his little "prince". He leaves me alone with the other two children. I'm bored of all the games they want to show me, and all the attention they want. I prefer talking to adults, and have started to avoid visiting my brother. That's a little sad.

Kids are funny in small doses, but most of the time I think they're just annoying, screaming and drooling small creatures that grow up to be selfish and self-centered. Mostly because of the parents, who treat them as more important than themselves or all other things. It's little, spoiled princes and princesses everywhere. I look with amazement of other childless women who seems to love the children and embrace them. Perhaps they are not voluntarily childfree? To be with children is not natural for me. But strangely enough the kids seem to like me very well. Maybe because I don't give a damn about them.

Some parents speak only about their kids. They don't have their own life. Then I'm extra glad not having children. And they all look so tired. Some of them expect me to be as concerned about their children as they are themselves, but I've always said that I'm not interested in kids. Why do they expect this of me? I think it's nice that friends have children, since that is what they want. But I think it's a shame that some of them disappears for their friends because they get children. Others manage to combine children and friends better. I wonder what they think about me. Perhaps I am like an overgrown child for them, or an overgrown teenager who likes to hang out at the cafe, go to parties and shop for clothes just for herself? I have not heard anything from my best friend after she got a child six months ago. Last time we met, she noticed that I was distant when she complained about the lack of sleep, exhausting life etc. Then she exclaimed: "I should have been in a mother-group. Why am I sitting here with you? "I felt I failed as a friend. I said that it was probably a good idea to enroll in a mother-group. Then there are other friends of mine that never talk about their kids when I meet them. If they "forget themselves" they apologize. But I've never felt that I'm not interested in what happens to their children. I am interested in everything in my friends' lives, the problem is when the focus on the children take completely over. To be honest, I expect to be pretty lonely when I get older. Unlike my friends, it will just be me, and probably my partner.

Waste of blood

The first sight of blood in my panties: Horror!

Old, smelly red stuff from prehistoric times seeping through me. Why me?

Mind and body parted. My body wanted to be fertilized, myself I wanted to work, play, party, explore the world. It felt unhealthy to disagree with my own nature. I thought it would give me cancer.

Primitive hormones forced me into claustrophobic cycles. During ovulation I was smart, happy, pretty, witty and articulate. On the opposite side of the cycle I was desperate, unintelligent, unhappy and unpretty. I cried, kicked in doors and smashed windows. Blood all over the place – old, sticky blood, smelled like dead babies piled up in towers of carefully folded and hidden sanitary towels.

Nature didn't care about me, I was just a tool.

I menstruated frequently and had many lovers. I became pregnant, had an abortion, got pregnant, had an abortion, got pregnant, had an abortion. The doctor said I was hyperfertile.

The sperm splatters were either too stupid or too crazy, breeding with them was out of the question. Breeding was out of the question.

There were already too many of us – I should have taken care of someone who was already born, rather than pushing my own genetic material into the world.

I was much more interested in theatre and music than in children and family issues. I was still celebrating the escape from my own family.

I did not have the money it would take to bring up a child in a secure environment. If I had been rich enough to have a nanny... or a faithful and dedicated father, then maybe I would consider it.

I wanted to stay childish and playful. Women change when having children. They become mothers, worried and rational.

I did not want to grow up one more time, go back to the institutions I had loved to leave – kindergarten, school, parent meetings, piano lessons ... I would not spend more time in those environments.

I hated weekdays. Children bring them back. Endless, predictable cycles based on digestion. I wanted out of these cycles and into other, larger, stranger, more unpredictable ones.

I was wild and impatient and dropped out of my theatre studies. I could not lean on any academic title, so I had to fight to get respect. I worked around the clock. It was annoying when female colleagues had to break up early in order to carry out their duties as mothers.

I did not want to play the role as an authority, set limits for others, while I myself worked with breaking boundaries.

Like most women, I am born with servant genes – I can read other people's needs, and have an innate desire to satisfy them.

Having a baby would turn my attention inward, toward my child, my family and away from society, away from myself. I wanted to relate to the whole world. There are no one as self-absorbed as the nuclear family.

I was an unplanned child. My coming forced my parents to marry. In the social context they grew up in, there was no other option. I had an option. I belonged to the first generation of Norwegian women who had a legal power over our own bodies. It was a right women had fought for in generations. I saw this as a great privilege, and somehow felt obliged to take advantage of the historic opportunity to not be a mother.

My mother had three children, four with my father. She was the rock and the power centre that nourished us all. She enveloped us with her love, her knowledge, her loyalty and organisation. It was wonderful to grow up in her skirt hem. I saw her, and I saw what it took to create a safe home to grow up in.

And how does it feel today, just turned 50? Good. After I got out of the hormonal cycle, I have finally come at one with my self. Looking back, it feels as if I have been a human being trapped inside a woman's body. It is like being born again. It is a pity, though, that a woman's life in this mode, is so short.

My own family is thinking that it either we're not able to have children, or it is something wrong with our relationship. People ask: "Do you have children? Yes, of course, you do have children?" "No, we do not have kids", "Aaaaaaaa, poor girl". That sort of comments. And then, if you say: "No, but we have chosen to not have children", then it, somehow ... then they look at me with some kind of suspiciousness. They think for themselves: "What the heck is this?"



When I was eight years old, I wanted to have a little baby. A little baby I could carry and cuddle with and love. I realized I was too young to be a mother myself, so I begged my mom and my dad that they should go to the bathroom, take off their clothes and make a baby to me. But they didn't. So I had to accept instead to have a baby doll bought for two dollar in Raufoss. I bathed and cuddled with the doll every day until I got a negro doll to my next birthday that was even sweeter than the first one and required less care. When I was twelve years old I was a nanny for an eight week old baby, I asked to be his nanny even before he was born. My four year old dream come true and I was so happy. Being on summer vacation that year was difficult: I missed the child intensely, I talked of nothing else but him. One year later, the love for the baby decreased dramatically, and to the extent that I didn't want to babysit anymore. Then I had been halfway mum in one year: not only that I had been babysitting five days a week, two hours each day, I had also been babysitting every other weekend and woke up in the nights to warm milk to the baby and whispered good night-songs for him, four or five times every night. And it was not romantic at all and not easy at all. I couldn't handle it. I was thirteen years old, and I no longer dreamed about children. And I did not dream about children when I was twenty. Or when I was thirty. Or when I was forty. On the contrary, the idea of having children became more and more strange to me. When I imagined the future, it included no family. I could not at all visualize how it would look like, that I would get up in the morning, go into the children's room, grab the kids, make breakfast, pack the drawstring bag, help them with homework, take them to football matches... That life did not exist as an opportunity, not in my body, neither in my mind.

I have not thought about being a woman not having children as something stigmatizing. And after all, Jesus, the ultimate example of our nature, died childless. Not having children does not mean you're without love. And we can all see it: the clash between nature and culture in our times. I can feel grief over the loss of authenticity in our lives, we are alienated from the life that we live as if we were tourists in the world, everything is about using and consuming, there is no longer the necessity that pushes us. But the longing for connecting with the world, with life, I am not so sure if the best solution is to have a baby. I do not miss my unborn child. I do not think it's sad that I will die without having my children around me. But sometimes I wonder what it's like to be pregnant and feel the baby kicking inside of me, or to give birth, alive and powerful, and I can imagine it, and it fills me with horror: it does not feel natural. And that it may not be natural to feel that way.



Der letzte Mensch is a sound installation based on *La Source de Vie* by Olivier Messiaen and texts by Scandinavian Women. Together with composer Stefan Thorsson and fifteen Not-Mothers, Liv Kristin Holmberg dives into the concept of Nulliparous.

Photo: Lazar Curčin

American Church in Berlin
Dennewitzplatz, 10783 Berlin, Germany
19th Sept at 11.45 pm - 01.00 am 20th Sept

Prosjektrommet, Traktorstallen, Eidsvoll Verk
Magoveien 24, 2074 Eidsvoll
13th Dec at 8 - 9 pm