

Anti-Pastoral and the Prophetic Mode in Moddi's Climate Songs

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Abstract

This article explores aspects of apocalypse and the pastoral in the climate-themed song lyrics of Norwegian indie folk artist Moddi. Through close listening and contextualizing of the songs “Noens ark” (“Someone’s ark,” 2013) and “En sang om fly” (“A song about planes,” 2013), apocalypse and pastoral emerge as key concepts. These are navigated in an exploration of a conflicted Norwegian response to global warming. The songs express a critique of the unrelenting pursuits of economic growth and personal consumption in the face of climate risk. Each in their own ways, elements of the selected songs are tailored to express an unsettling encounter with a global environmental risk scenario. “Noens ark” employs forceful instrumentation and polyrhythms to evoke a sense of alarm and urgency in response to the projection of future disaster. “En sang om fly” is a soft composition projecting nostalgia for the material conditions of the present. The desire for these conditions ultimately locks the singer in a cycle of repetition that destabilizes the very conditions he desires, which are linked to connections at the local level. The nuances afforded by this expression in musical performance allows song lyrics to sustain contradictory attitudes towards globalization. In their pursuit of these contradictions, Moddi’s climate songs can be seen as aligned to an anti-pastoral tradition. Features of musical genre and a prophetic lyric mode are employed to evoke and subvert the pastoral response to apocalypticism. By musically sustaining contradictions between pastoral and apocalypse, Moddi’s songs reflect a conflict between Norwegian identity and a global cultural imaginary in the face of global warming.

Keywords: Norway, song lyrics, climate change, disaster imaginary, indie folk.

Resumen

Este artículo estudia elementos de los géneros apocalíptico y pastoral presentes en las letras de las canciones de Moddi, un artista noruego de *indie folk*, que abordan el tema del clima. La escucha detenida y el análisis en contexto de las canciones “Noens ark” (“El arca de alguien”, 2013) y “En sang om fly” (“Una canción sobre aviones”, 2013) revelan el papel que lo apocalíptico y lo pastoral juegan como conceptos clave en estas composiciones y facilitan el análisis de la ambivalente respuesta de Noruega ante el fenómeno del calentamiento global. Las canciones critican la búsqueda incesante del crecimiento económico y un mayor consumismo sobre un trasfondo marcado por los riesgos climáticos. Ciertos elementos de las canciones analizadas son utilizados de diferentes formas para recrear la inquietud que suscita el panorama de riesgo climático global. “Noens ark” se sirve de una instrumentación potente y de polirritmos para evocar la alarma y urgencia que provoca la previsión de un desastre futuro. “En sang om fly” es una composición tenue que despierta nostalgia por las condiciones materiales presentes. El anhelo por alcanzarlas logra atrapar al cantante en un ciclo repetitivo que desestabiliza dichas condiciones materiales presentes y sus manifestaciones de carácter local. Los matices expresivos derivados de estas variaciones en la ejecución musical hacen posible que las letras de las canciones expresen actitudes contradictorias respecto a la globalización. La exploración de estas contradicciones permite que las canciones sobre el clima de Moddi puedan considerarse como parte de una tradición anti-pastoral. Las características del género musical y el carácter profético de las letras se usan para evocar y subvertir una respuesta pastoral al apocalipsis. Al canalizar musicalmente las contradicciones entre lo pastoral y lo apocalíptico, las canciones de

Moddi reflejan un conflicto entre la identidad noruega y un imaginario cultural global con respecto al calentamiento global.

Palabras clave: Noruega, letras de canciones, cambio climático, imaginario de desastres, indie folk.

Introduction

The publication of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) 2012 special report, "Managing the Risks of Extreme Events and Disasters to Advance Climate Change Adaptation," was emblematic of a cultural environment increasingly focused on the risk of climate disasters. In the years leading up to 2012, pseudo-religious predictions about the end of the world, in particular linked to the end of the Mayan "Long Count" calendar on December 21, 2012, were a source of apocalyptic and dystopian speculation in popular culture (Stilter). Apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic narratives flourished at a time when the pursuit of political action against global warming seemed more and more futile. The 2009 Copenhagen summit of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) resulted in the draft of a framework for climate change mitigation beyond 2012. However, the framework was not legally binding, and failed to create an adequate successor to the Kyoto Protocol, whose first commitment period was set to end in 2012, and which had already been criticized for not including the United States (BBC, Reuters). In an atmosphere of disillusionment with the efforts of the international community, the IPCC report signaled a sense that the world should prepare for catastrophe and was a perfect addition to fuel the apocalyptic imaginary that had intensified in popular culture.

The disaster prospects of global warming have become a prominent subject of art, literature, and popular media in Scandinavia. Louise Mønster describes an "apocalyptic consciousness" spreading in Scandinavian poetry (159). In works like Danish poet Lars Skinnebach's *Øvelser og rituelle tekster* (*Exercises and ritual texts*, 2011), whose "people's edition" included a statement on the back reading "Kunst der ikke beskæftiger sig med klimakrisen er ikke værd at beskæftige sig med" ("art that does not deal with the climate crisis is not worth dealing with"), the climate theme and the anticipation of impending catastrophe go hand in hand. Skinnebach conveys a sense of urgency, as if it is up to poetry to address the situation that politicians are unable to handle. What Mønster identifies in Skinnebach and other contemporary works of poetry is a tendency that extends to popular music, in what I term "climate songs": songs that express fears and frustrations regarding the state of the climate, addressing the hypocrisies of a society unable or unwilling to deal with the issue. In many of his songs, Norwegian artist Moddi confronts a society that continues to foster environmentally transgressive lifestyles, even while commonly acknowledging the risk of climate disaster. His song "Noens ark" ("Someone's ark," 2013) conveys alarm over the violence society is inflicting upon itself, while "En sang om fly" ("A song about

planes," 2013) is a calm but frustrated meditation on living on contradictory terms with the future. These songs serve as reflection and warning of the risks associated with global warming.

One of the most outspoken activist singers in Norway, Moddi has branded himself as an eco-conscious artist, touring via train and electric car (Bjørhovde; Thronsen), and contributing to environmental projects (Rygge; Johansen). Singing in the dialect of Senja island, a rural area in northern Norway, Moddi's climate engagement is rooted in local experiences. In her study of a local community in Norway, Kari Marie Norgaard found that while most Norwegians readily admit that they believe global warming to be real and are widely aware that their own consumption patterns severely contribute to the problem, very few people take social action against climate change. Norgaard shows an acute contradiction between the Norwegian self-image as environmentally progressive, and a social organization characterized by denial (88). On one hand, Norwegians exhibit a strong cultural attachment to the country's natural landscapes, and most Norwegians prioritize the environment over economic growth (Halman et al. 106). The country has spearheaded global sustainability efforts through the Brundtland Commission, named after former prime minister and labor party leader Gro Harlem Brundtland. On the other hand, the cornerstone in the state economy is the oil industry. The country has one of Europe's highest proportions of people who do not believe in anthropogenic climate change (ESS 4), and the average carbon footprint of Norwegian households increased by 25% from 1999 to 2012 (Steen-Olsen et al. 588). The patterns indicated by these figures show a polarized culture at odds with its own ecological ideals. Articulating this duality in popular music brings into question the relationship between local identity and globalized culture.

This article will focus on Moddi's songs "Noens ark" and "En sang om fly." Both songs appear on the album *Kæm va du? (Who were you?, 2013)*, and are the only songs on the album whose music and lyrics are written by Moddi himself (the latter co-written with Maren Skolem). Although Moddi has many songs relating to climate change and the relationship between local and global identity (notably on his 2022 album *Bråtebrann*), his 2013 album displays an early response to the apocalypticism that was prevalent around the time of its release. Apart from the two climate songs, the album features murder ballads based on folk legends and other folk songs interpreted in a context of exploring the dark side of northern Norwegian locality and meditations on an unknown future. In engaging with the selected songs, I attempt to answer the following questions: What themes dominate Moddi's climate songs? How are the lyric words modified in the context of musical composition and performance? And which tensions in the Norwegian cultural imaginary are evinced in Moddi's climate songs?

The analysis will be informed by theory relating to three main issues: Firstly, performance strategies related to popular music genre, specifically the genre of indie folk, which corresponds to Moddi's commercial form combining elements of indie and folk music, and which has commonly served to explore and sustain tensions relating

to global consumerist culture (Bamle, "Indie-folk" 487). Secondly, the interconnection between apocalypse and pastoral, where pastoral serves an underlying sentiment of nostalgia which gives rise to conflict in the face of apocalypticism, resulting in what I have termed an anti-pastoral response (see Gifford, "Pastoral, Anti-Pastoral, Post-Pastoral"). Thirdly, the prophetic mode of apocalyptic discourse, by which apocalypse serves not merely as a prediction of future turmoil, but as a present response to what Isak Winkel Holm calls "the Disaster Imaginary" (104). Based on this study, I suggest that Moddi's expression can be described as anti-pastoral, because the examined songs intentionally play with genre conventions to subvert a nostalgic response to apocalypticism. Through a prophetic mode, the singer offers two warnings of a worsening climate. One is violently imposing itself on the listener ("Noens ark") and the other is self-incriminating ("En sang om fly"). Tensions in song lyrics or between the musical and lyrical levels of these songs reflects parallel tensions between local geography and cosmopolitan identities in the face of global warming. Although appeals for betterment in these songs are outwardly directed, they include a self-reflective element, including criticism of Norwegian culture specifically and Western culture in general.

Song Lyrics in a Genre Context

To study song lyrics is to study not only words set to music, but also performance as embedded in both a musical tradition and a social and political context. Although it would be helpful to distinguish meaning emerging from the words and the musical accompaniment from one another, they are in practice materially and sensorily inseparable as they are perceived together as a unit (Jensen and Knust 58). My analysis will therefore focus equally on the referential meaning of lyrics and the performative expressions that contribute to the overall social meaning of the songs (see Brummett). Analysis focusing on song lyrics by a combination of literary and performance study is a new practice. The precursors to song lyric studies lie in popular music studies (Frith; Fornäs; Griffiths) but has recently emerged as a distinct field of study (Eckstein; Pattison; Karlsen and Markussen). My study is a contribution to this expanding body of scholarship, paying special attention to song lyrics in a climate political context.

In terms of genre categories, Moddi is aligned with indie folk. The "folk" in indie folk does not refer to traditional music, but to a popularized folk tradition that gave rise to urban folk in the 1960s and which draws stylistic inspiration from the modal tonalities and song structures of traditional folk. Inspired by artists like Neil Young and Joni Mitchell internationally, and Finn Kalvik and Lillebjørn Nilsen in Norway, ecological protest is part of its genre legacy. Indie folk, however, drawing as much from the DIY aesthetics of indie rock as from the folk tradition, is introverted compared to the socially engaged urban folk movement, and while nostalgic for traditional ways of performing music, it is not trying to revive the styles of its predecessors (Fonarow 44, 49; Ingram 174; Stimeling 194). Indie folk arrangements

generally highlight acoustic instruments and folk-inspired vocal harmonies and has a recognizable timbre usually consisting of gentle instrumental reverberations and understated vocals (Blake). In terms of vocal performance and his active political engagements, Moddi is closer to a traditional folk singer than a typical indie folk singer, but his rhythmically and instrumentally complex compositions are indicative of indie folk. In "Noens ark," which features uncharacteristically heavy percussion, the return to a calm soundscape highlighting the vocal in the final section shows that the song ultimately abides by the genre norms of indie folk.

Indie folk's toned-down musical texture primarily works to evoke a sense of nostalgia for an imagined rural past (Coleman; Holt and Kärjä; Mitchell; Størvold). The centrality of nostalgic sentimentality in the genre is supported by Niels van Poecke, who describes indie folk as an attempt to preserve the romantic myth of authenticity in a pop music discourse (van Poecke 17, 99). Nostalgia in this view is not only linked to images of a historical past but could equally apply to the romanticizing of local identities from which one has been estranged. Romantic aesthetics of specific geographies can be distinguished in Moddi's portrayals of northern Norway. A crucial function in the present context is how indie folk's generally soft compositions can downplay the sense of urgency expressed in climate-themed lyrics, replacing the anticipation of apocalypse with pastoral scenes. In "En sang om fly" this can cause listeners to overlook the song's political message. Several scholars have noted that such misperceptions of political messages in popular music are common (Bamle "Force"; Weinstein). In Moddi's case, however, the nostalgia effects of indie folk may not simply distract from the overarching environmentalist message, but also add another dimension to his lyrical exploration of global warming and the cultural imaginary.

Pastoral, Apocalypse and the Disaster Imaginary

According to Alexander Rehding there are two main ways in which popular music responds to ecological issues: in terms of either apocalypse or nostalgia. These responses parallel two key literary genres highlighted in ecocritical scholarship: apocalypse and pastoral (Garrard; Furuseth and Hennig). Both conceptual pairs describe archetypes that music or literature may approach in response to climate risks. The former may be more spectacular, but the latter has an equally powerful emotional appeal, particularly in the indie folk genre. The lyrical descriptions of landscapes that appear throughout Moddi's music, performed in his recognizably local dialect, evoke not only nostalgia, but pastoral scenes. The music establishes a default mood, via images of secluded locations in northern Norway where life can exist in harmony with its environment. The music itself wants to return to this mood when it is upset by the threat of apocalypse. On *Kæm va du?*, Moddi effectively contrasts the two moods to imbue each of them with emotional force.

The effectiveness of this contrastive pairing demonstrates that conceptions of apocalypse and pastoral rely on one another. According to Lawrence Buell, the idea

of an environmental apocalypse is undergirded by a pastoral logic, as an imposing sense of apocalypse rests on the idea of an antecedent state of harmony between humankind and nature (Buell 300). Ursula K. Heise agrees with Buell when she argues that apocalyptic narratives always, implicitly or explicitly, present pastoral as an alternative to environmental catastrophe (Heise 141-2). Apocalyptic narratives rely on pastoral as a necessary contrast to accentuate the gravity of the nearing situation (122). Likewise, the pastoral is braced by apocalyptic consciousness. It is due to the cultural prevalence of pastoral that apocalypse has a wide influence today, and vice versa.

The prevalence of both cultural tropes today can be considered in connection with a cultural transition from local to global consciousness, a transition that becomes increasingly relevant in confrontation with risk scenarios like global warming (Heise 13). Heise points out the difficulty of combining local narratives with global consciousness, showing how it is a problem in narrative and lyrical genres to articulate the connection between events at the local and global levels (205-10). Moddi being locally oriented and singing in a Norwegian dialect reflects a strong local identity. However, his songs reflect loosening attachment to the local as the individual is entangled in a global cultural sphere through consumption. The contemporary challenge of globalism is not unprecedented. Pastoral as a literary genre originated in classical times and developed into a culturally prevalent mode during the Romantic period, as industrialization forced a large part of the population into cities and away from the countryside (Gifford, "Pastoral, Anti-Pastoral, Post-Pastoral" 18). The alienating modernity of the Romantic period is mirrored in today's increasingly fragmented media market, where technology facilitates the targeting of individuals with algorithmically customized advertisements, to provide services that implicate people further in the globalized business models of multinational corporations. The appeal of nostalgic genres such as indie folk, comes in part from a contemporary sense of cultural fragmentation and an underlying desire to return to a romanticized past of local communities and cultural stability.

Buell suggests that the pastoral not only functions as escape but has a critical force in the present (44). Here, Buell follows Leo Marx' distinction between simple and complex pastorals, where a simple pastoral functions as a conservative retreat from present conditions which ultimately serves to reinforce dominant social structures, while a complex pastoral serves a reformist function by presenting an idyllic past in opposition to undesirable conditions in the present (Ingram 55). Terry Gifford advances this distinction by suggesting a dialectical relationship between the two modes. In his account, the pastoral has historically been met with satires and other texts that serve as anti-pastoral correctives, often directly addressing perpetrators of some evil concealed by the pastoral (Gifford, *Pastoral* 122; "Pastoral, Anti-Pastoral, Post-Pastoral" 22). These subversive forms may be identified as a tradition of complex pastorals in Marx's terms, but they are specific in that they are situated in a dialectical relationship to simple pastoral. The dialectic ultimately results in what Gifford calls the post-pastoral mode, but this mode has not come to

replace the pastoral and anti-pastoral. Instead, they coexist, at times even simultaneously in certain texts (Gifford, "Pastoral, Anti-Pastoral, Post-Pastoral" 28).

Heather Sullivan has coined "dark pastoral" as an ecocritical trope. Inspired by Timothy Morton's "dark ecology", the dark pastoral recognizes the entanglement of the environment in human activity, removing any sense of nature as pristine or even a fundamental condition of the earth (Sullivan; Morton, "Ecological Thought"; "Dark Ecology"). The "artificial natural" of the dark pastoral is always somehow ironic, polluted, mixing the "green" with the "gray" (Sullivan 20). Moddi's songs often align with this trope, which seems to fit particularly well with the industrialized landscapes on his 2022 album *Bråtebrann*. Nevertheless, Moddi's pastoral subversion on *Kæm va du?* is perhaps best described as anti-pastoral, since through the prophetic mode of song lyrics the singer provides a corrective to the impulses towards pastoral inherent in the music. Anti-pastoral can be seen as indie folk's proper response to the risk of climate apocalypse, as artists transition from a local to global orientation and engender an increased focus on the relationship between present and future time. Whereas this transition often produces simple nostalgia, Moddi utilizes the pastoral connotations to raise the emotional stakes in confrontation with risk scenarios.

Like pastoral, apocalypse comes in different types. Following a distinction first suggested by Kenneth Burke and later developed by Stephen O'Leary, apocalypse may be received through a tragic or comic "frame of acceptance" (Garrard 95). The "tragic" apocalypse conceives of threat as an evil perpetration. The guilt of the perpetrators is contrasted by the victimhood of others. As a response to global warming, the rhetoric of tragic apocalypse can lead to a reductive view of causes that may be varied and multiple, and a delusive search for culprits (Garrard 15). In contrast, the "comic" apocalypse conceives of evil as error, and redemption lies in the exposure of fallibility (O'Leary 95). The two songs analyzed below reflect opposite frames in relation to the apocalypse. "Noens ark" demonstrates a tragic frame in its emphasis on global inequality and implications of certain groups as responsible for the coming crisis. In contrast, the comic frame is decisive in "En sang om fly," which serves as a warning against environmentally detrimental behaviors with inadvertently disastrous consequences.

Importantly, apocalypse in the context of these songs cannot be reduced to prediction. Even though the songs meditate on the future, and "Noens ark" takes the form of a revelation of future doom, the songs can be understood in terms of a prophetic mode in which the singer indirectly addresses the present. The word prophet, from Greek *prophétes*, meaning "proclaimer" or someone who "speaks" (*phenai*) "before" (*pro*), is commonly understood as someone who predicts the future, but is more correctly understood as someone who reveals the secret layers of reality to an audience (Holm 95). Inspired by Max Weber's interpretation of Old Testament prophets as social critics rather than futurists, Isak Winkel Holm suggests that the prophetic mode entails an imaginative projection of a future disaster to frame our perception of the present world in terms of a "disaster imaginary" (Holm 95). In line with this interpretation, Moddi's songs are not only concerned with future disaster,

but with how disaster illuminates objectionable conditions in present culture. Global warming presents the listener with a range of disaster risk scenarios with which to frame the present world.

Global Warming as Apocalypse in “Noens ark” (“Someone’s Ark”)¹

“Noens ark” is a pun on the Old Testament story of Noah, who was tasked by God to build an ark to save his family and two of every animal from a flood that would wipe away all other life on earth and wash away the sins of humanity. In his own version of this story, Moddi replaces Noah with the word “Noen” (“Someone”), allowing listeners to wonder who the song is alluding to in place of the righteous prophet. Noah’s flood serves as a productive allegory for engaging with current fears of climate apocalypse. Following a short intro, the song begins by mentioning the story of Noah and the flood, establishing a contrast between the vengeful storm that washed away the sins of the past, and the untainted landscape that followed: “Have you heard the story of old Noah’s Ark? / About [the time] when solid mountains and a new day rose from the sea?”² At the center of the story are humans. This is not simply the story of cosmic events, but of how people can suffer climatic cataclysm through the metaphorical will of God. The second and third lines remind us that only a select few were allowed to survive the flood: “Heaven’s rain of tears would wash everything away, / but some were allowed safe passage through the storm.”³ When the chosen ones came through the storm, they found that the earth was soft and adaptable to human will. This allowed the people who survived the storm to cultivate the earth and form a new civilization: “Come, let me tell you about the wonder they saw, / about when the earth was made soft and could be shaped.”⁴ The singer acts as a storyteller, inviting the listener to hear and be inspired by the promise of a new beginning, but also warning the listener that they may not count themselves so lucky when they presumably must navigate a coming storm: “Nameless and naked you too will go there one day, / and as a refugee you shall sail through the storm.”⁵ The story of Noah is the story of God’s vengeance upon the sinners of the world. Parallel to this story, the coming storm is one that will be caused by sins endemic to the new civilization. A connection is made, then, between the growth of modern society and a flood of biblical proportions coming to wash everything away.

The song marks a momentary departure from an album of otherwise calm music, which makes it powerful as an environmentalist statement. The E minor key establishes a forbidding mood. An upright piano and double bass, and the constant smashing of cymbals form the basis of a thick musical texture, further thickened at

¹ The translations of song lyrics offered in this article were made by me in communication with Moddi. Official song lyric transcriptions in Norwegian can be accessed on <http://moddi.no/lyrics>.

² Har du hørt historia om gamle Noahs ark / om då fast fjell og en ny dag steig av havet?”

³ “himmelen sett tåreregn sku vaske allteng bort / men nån få fækk fare trøgt igjønna kavet”.

⁴ “kom, ska eg førrtelle om det underet dem såg / om då jorda gjor seg mjuk og lot seg forme”.

⁵ “namnelaus og naken ska du dit en dag du og / og som fløktning ska du seile gjønna stormen”.

times by strings and horns. It is the only song on the album to prominently feature a drum kit. Although using only acoustic instruments, in every capacity the music is forceful. Through this cacophony the singer must shout to be heard, emulating the shouting through the storm that is described in the lyrics. Polyrythms enforce a sense of disorientation. In the first few seconds of the song an egg shaker indicates a 12/8 time signature, but the piano initially follows a rhythm closer to the waltz (3/4 rate). It is in fact a 12/8 which is subdivided in beats of 2, 3 and 4 simultaneously, where the double bass plays twice every bar, the drums mark every third beat, and Moddi's voice emphasizes the fourth beat. Additionally, the song changes to an irregular tempo of 5/4 from 1'45" to 2'14". The song's aggressive use of instruments and disorienting rhythmic patterns coupled with Moddi's articulate performance style, makes it a conspicuous protest song. It is attention-grabbing, underscoring the singer's role as prophet, indicated both through the song's allusion to the prophet Noah, and through the lyrics emulating a village storyteller. The performance of prophetic lyrics in a tempestuous musical arrangement is a provocation of disaster imaginary that resonates with a climate conscious audience.

The word "Someone"⁶ is used twice in the song. In line 18, it is stated that "Everyone here has been given a place on board Someone's ark"⁷ and in line 27 it is stated that "as waves break against the boards again, it is Someone's work."⁸ From these lines we may infer that "Someone" fills both roles of sinner and saved in the narrative of the coming storm. So, who causes the storm, and who will be saved? The third verse gives us a clue, as it describes the storm emerging from the global West:

Can you hear the swell of thunder in the west,
where the Dream grows in injustice you must bear?
Here where the rich shall become richer and where every day is a feast[!]
between skyscrapers that will grow until they fall over⁹

"The Dream" (capitalized in the official transcription) and "skyscrapers" are symbols commonly associated with the United States of America, and the word "here" indicates an identification with these symbols. By extension, the reference is the capitalist developed world, where the "Dream" is typified by the accumulation of wealth. The words "injustice you must bear" appearing in the second line are a plausible reference to Arnulf Øverland's famous poem "Du må ikke sove" ("Dare not to sleep," 1936), which warned against the dangers of fascism and the rise of Adolf Hitler in the period before the atrocities of the Second World War came to pass. This reference is a prophetic parallel to Moddi's own warning of the atrocities the West may be inflicting upon the rest of the world through its disregard of the global environment and its pursuit of wealth accumulation. Note that Moddi places special

⁶ "noen"

⁷ "alle her har fått en plass ombord på noens ark"

⁸ "idet båra bryt mot bord igjen, det e noens verk"

⁹ "kan du høyre dønningen av torevêr i vest
kor Drømmen gror i urett du må tåle?
her kor rike ska bi rikar og kor kver dag e en fest
imella høghus som ska gro tel dem fell over"

emphasis on the word “feast” by shouting it in a celebratory manner. With this gesture he momentarily exemplifies a carefree attitude which stands in sharp contrast to prophetic warning in the surrounding lines. The critical touch in the verse comes when the symbol of this system, the skyscrapers, grow so tall that they can no longer stand, suggesting that the inherent unsustainability of the capitalist system will eventually cause it to collapse upon itself. (The Old Testament connotation also recalls the story of the Tower of Babel, where God intervened to curb the hubristic pursuit of a building that would reach heaven itself.) While the third verse portrays the West in general, the fifth verse can be thought to refer to Norway in particular. Here, Moddi uses the first-person plural pronoun to address his own community. Providing additional context, he first describes the Norwegian landscape, and then alludes to the national myth of how the state became wealthy when oil was found in its ocean territories: “We who surrendered the rain between mountain peaks in the north / and were favorably positioned when luck struck at random.”¹⁰ Since Moddi sings in Norwegian, it is likely that Norwegians are the addressees and referents of this song. The collective “we’ indicates a critique of the singer’s own people. “Surrendering the rain between mountain peaks in the north” could refer to northern Norwegians, like Moddi himself, who have moved to the urban south of the country, or it could refer to Norwegians generally who have abandoned nature in the pursuit of carbon wealth.

When Moddi sings that “Everyone here has been given a place on board Someone’s ark,”¹¹ it is not unreasonable to hear connotations of the Norwegian oil fund, sometimes described as an economic “lifeboat” that will hopefully carry the state and its people through whatever cataclysm may befall the rest of the earth. But this lifeboat is itself an accumulation of wealth, built on the fossil fuel industry which has caused CO₂ to accumulate in the atmosphere. Norwegians are favorably positioned to traverse the coming storm of global warming, which they themselves must bear the responsibility for having created. Norway’s environmental privilege, which as pointed out by Norgaard means that the country’s citizens benefit in economic terms from maintaining a naïveté regarding their self-involvement in global warming, illustrates the country’s complicity in the creation and perpetuation of global injustice (70-72). The gavel of criticism falls hard in the following lines:

And even though you carry messages of peace in the depth of your heart
you must go where open seas froth.
For you the rain of tears shall be a self-lived memory
because you were born where evil must reign.¹²

¹⁰ “vi som prisga regnet mellom fjelltoppa i nord / og stod lagelig tel då løkka traff tilfeldig”. [Translation note: Moddi originally approved a mistranslation of “prisga’ as “praised’ which yielded a similar but not identical translation. I have chosen to correct this in the current version. Another alternative translation would be “prized,” which would suggest the notion of assigning a price to the rain, for example in the form of hydropower development. Norway’s extensive use of hydropower might be environmentally friendly compared to fossil fuels, however it can have disastrous consequences locally and can be seen as an early step in the industrialization of Norwegian nature.]

¹¹ “alle her har fått en plass ombord på noens ark”

¹² “og sjøll om du bær bud om fred i hjertet innerst inne
må du fare der kor åpen sjy fråde

The “messages of peace” alludes to the Norwegian self-conception as a peace-loving people, a conception which is ceremoniously reinforced every year when the Nobel Peace Prize is awarded in Oslo. But despite this outward sign of virtue, Norwegians must live and experience the “rain of tears” that will come. The hypocrisy is that most Norwegians individually praise the climate movement, but still partake in an unsustainable capitalist economy. The prediction offered in these lines is that they will know in the aftermath that they were as responsible as anyone.

Prophetic discourse speaks to a complicated relationship with time. The growth economy is not equipped to consider pollution of the atmosphere and the future costs of handling the effects of a warming climate. Norway's consumption patterns are possible because of what can be metaphorically described as borrowing from the future. It is this future that is collapsing on the present when confronted with global warming. Climate songs confront us with the sense that global warming is no longer a future potentiality but is imposing itself on the present with force. Apart from the biblical allusions in the title and lyrics of the song, this temporal imposition is a key feature linking the prophetic mode with apocalypse. Apocalyptic discourse draws speaker and listener into a context of cosmic time, where the judgment of the future becomes imminent (O'Leary 16).

As we have seen, the initial story offered by the singer in the first and second verses of “Noens ark” establishes a contrast between a past idyll and a tempestuous weather event. The transition between the fourth and fifth verses provides a related contrast. An early musical climax is achieved as the song reaches peak intensity in the fourth verse:

So fold your hands and sing psalms
about the rain that will come
Sing of Babylon and white elephants
You are still condemned when the day is over,
when water rolls in from all sides.¹³

This verse gives us clear allusions to apocalyptic imagery, juxtaposing symbols of materialistic excess (“Babylon and white elephants”) with condemnation and signaling the end in the form of strong winds and rising water. The appeal to the institutions of culture, to rituals and religion, will not be enough to save society from the retribution of natural forces. Following a musical crescendo coinciding with these lines, the fifth verse offers a calm contrast with a reminder of society's current illusions. The “mountain peaks in the north” evokes a national romantic imagery. When “luck struck at random” the romantic idyll is expanded from natural beauty to

førr deg ska tåreregnet bi et sjøllopplevd minne
førr du fødtes der kor ondskapen må råde”

¹³ “så knepp nevan og søng salma
om regnet som ska komme
søng om babylon og kvite elefanta
du e førrtapt allikavæll når dagen e omme
idet vatn velte inn frå alle kanta.”

include economic growth. However, this idyllic condition is presented to us in the past tense, narrated as if commenting from a problematic future. It is an imaginary retrospective from an anticipated post-apocalyptic condition, and it is an illusory image as the presence itself is taken away by the disillusioning words of the prophet. The idyll is not the present seen in light of the future, but the anticipated future view of our present conditions, as the singer expects the end of the current standard of living. The final verse describes a door of an “ark” closing, and waves crashing against the planks of the ship, as some people are left outside to perish, and a lucky few, presumably the rich Westerners or Norwegians, i.e. those who are most complicit in bringing about the storm, will survive to build a new world. The closing sentiment is hopeful, but the delivery is doubtful: “Perhaps next time Someone will have learned.”¹⁴ The song does not provide suggestions on how people in the present might deal with the climate crisis. A small hope remains that the culprits will realize their responsibility before it is too late. Considering that nobody seems to have learnt anything from the myth of the previous flood, we can only wait and see if the story will repeat itself yet again.

Anti-Pastoral Nostalgia in “En sang om fly” (“A song about planes”)

Although employing the prophetic mode, “Noens ark” cannot be reduced to a simple apocalyptic narrative. While the song highlights apocalyptic symbolism, the pastoral is looming below, emerging as national romantic imagery, and providing a contrast which increases poetic tension. “En sang om fly,” by comparison, evokes pastoral through its nostalgic musical arrangement, yet there is an uncertainty and a defiance in the core of Moddi’s artistic expression. The song is a calm introspection. The song’s A-flat major key gives it an optimistic tone, in contrast to the ominous E minor of “Noens ark”. It is not professing a future in dramatic terms, but it still imagines the shaking of the present in view of an uncertain future, and a confrontation with the hypocrisy of present cultural practices. The song is a powerful environmental statement not from sheer force of expression, but from a discrepancy between harmonies that evoke a pastoral idyll and lyrics indicating that this idyll is illusory. Only upon realizing the irony of the singer’s words will the listener realize that they have been baited and implicated by partaking in an optimistic delusion. Moddi here utilizes the potential of a song to challenge the assumptions that it simultaneously encourages listeners to make (Moore 19).

The song opens with a gently picked acoustic guitar highlighting a soft but clear voice. Piano and cello are introduced at the end of the first verse and remain in the background as harmonic filler throughout the track. The tranquil atmosphere of this song serves well as the culmination of an album whose lyrics highlight the landscapes of northern Norway through similar acoustic harmonies and lyrical depictions. The mood evoked throughout the album is akin to a particularly northern

¹⁴ “kanskje neste gong har noen lært”

Norwegian version of pastoral. This genre is exemplified by Knut Hamsun's novel *Markens Grøde* (*Growth of the Soil*, 1917), a reference with which Moddi interacts in the song "Grønt lauv i snyen" and specifically references in his later song "Ei ny tid" (*Bråtebrann*). Hamsun's pastoral does not shy away from the harsh conditions of nature, but under these conditions the protagonists manage to prosper. While the first half of the album deals with darkness and violence in the opening murder ballad "Mannen i Ausa" and the sheep slaughter chant "Vi slakta sau," culminating with "Noens ark" midway through the album, the second half is a series of folk songs in slow tempo, with sparse instrumentation and lyrics meditating on the natural and cultural landscapes of northern Norway. Listeners assume a continuation of this pastoral mood as they are presented with gentle timbres of the finale.

The pleasant harmonies of "En sang om fly" indicate a sense that serenity has prevailed, but the lyrics undercut this expectation. The melody conveys optimism appropriate to a naïve longing for the pleasures of travel, expressed in the opening lines: "I want to see the world, just like everyone else / rather make some mistakes than live in regret."¹⁵ The optimistic melody, befitting the daydream of these lines, persists when the singer introduces the ominous contrast of a snowstorm in July. It is hinted that the dream is not benign but in fact contributes to climate change. Optimism turns to irony in the following lines: "And when the sky gives us snowstorms in July / I can say I did the only thing one could, back when everything was possible. / When we took one step backwards for each step we took forwards."¹⁶ If the possibilities are endless, as stated by the singer in these lines, it stands to reason that compulsion ("I did the only thing one could") is not a valid excuse for environmentally destructive behavior. And yet, allured by the musical accompaniment, the singer of these lines seems not to realize the paradox in their ambition. The song here exhibits a contradictory behavior by capitalizing on the variance between form and message afforded by the conventions of indie folk.

"En sang om fly" subverts the pastoral while simultaneously participating in the pastoral aesthetic. Through ironic distance between music and lyrical sentiment, the song draws the listener out of the suspended time of pastoral idyll. The singer thinks that now is a moment when anything is still possible, but having already entered the reality of global warming the future encroaches on the present. The idyll is gradually subverted with the realization that the singer's nostalgia means that he is living with one foot in the past. The subversion is framed by the disaster imaginary, either stemming from the encounter with apocalyptic imagery earlier on the album, or from pervasive apocalypticism in popular culture. The tension which arises between the levels of music and lyrics in "En sang om fly" involves a deliberate disruption of pastoral illusions with the apocalypse as leverage. In doing so the song positions itself as anti-pastoral (Gifford, "Pastoral, Anti-Pastoral, Post-Pastoral" 22; Ingram 57). Under the cloud of environmental collapse, the imaginary places the

¹⁵ "Eg vil se verden, sånn som alle ainner: / heller gjere nån feil enn å leve i anger".

¹⁶ "og når hemmelen gjer oss snystorm i juli / så kan eg sei eg gjor det einaste man kunne den gång alt va mulig / då vi tok ett skrett telbakers førr kvert framskrett vi gjor".

present already in the past. The song reacts to a disillusioning present dialectically opposed to the longed-for nostalgic past typified by the pastoral.

Moddi's musical nostalgia is linked to the desire to anchor local identity in the face of cultural anxiety tied to risk on the global scale. While the music seeks rural escape, the lyrics are constantly navigating the imposition of global consciousness. The singer expresses a desire to be reified by the fantastic lives of television stars: "I want to live like they do on TV, / where everything is a game, but where everyone at least sees you."¹⁷ The fictions of television offer escape by capturing the attention and alleviating the anxieties of real life. More importantly, TV offers the illusion of connection. TV ties the lives of performers to viewers all around the country, or even the world. Paradoxically, the connection that is sought is exactly the connection that is destroyed when global structures replace local connections. TV, like popular music, is tied to global consumer markets, and hence part of the polluting practices of modern society. In this song there is tension between the desire for the comforts of life as it could be, the fantasy of which is aided by television, and the commitment to confront the reality of a future in turmoil.

The final line demonstrates the stasis in this line of thinking. As the line "One step back, one step towards now" ("ett skrett telbakers, ett skrett nærmar no") is repeated, the song itself is in standstill. It does not move forward, just as the singer and our society do not move forward. This passage can be interpreted as saying that society cannot progress, because every advancement is accompanied by setback in planetary terms. The repeated line intensifies in a dynamic arrangement. The listener expects the song to reach some sort of climax, but it is cut short by the end. Occasionally Moddi exchanges the word "now" ("no") with "the earth" ("jorda"). This detail directs the listener towards a choice: either they can continue to ignore the climate crisis, or they may be urged to pay more attention to the planet and how they can adapt to its conditions. Until they become aware of the limitations of the earth, they will not be able to move forwards at all.

Conclusion

This study sought to examine the themes that dominate Moddi's climate song lyrics, how these are supported and developed in a popular musical context, and how the songs are informed by and responding to underlying currents in Norwegian cultural imaginary. The preoccupation with disaster is symptomatic of the time in which these songs were released. Moddi's use of disaster motifs can be seen in connection with a widespread preoccupation with end-of-the-world narratives around the year 2012. Against this backdrop, pastoral and apocalypse suffuse these songs, directing the lyrical response towards a negotiation between present and future temporality. The rhetorical gesture of the prophetic mode, which draws the

¹⁷ "eg vil leve som dem gjær det på teve / der kor alt e et spell, men der alle i det minste ser det". [Translation note: "det" in the official transcription, usually meaning "it", is given as "you" in my translation because the vocalized dialect word "dæ" is more commonly heard as "you"].

future into the present, is prompted by expectations of an impending global apocalypse. In the context of global warming, pastoral is disturbed by the threat of future disaster. Likewise, apocalypticism is framed by pastoral elements. The affordances of musical performance in indie folk enable exploration of the entanglement of these tropes. Moddi ultimately subverts the pastoral mode in a response that can be connected to an anti-pastoral tradition in literature.

In confrontation with global warming, contradictions arise in the musical genre too, as indie folk is constructed on a basis of traditions with both local and cosmopolitan attachments. This tension allows the music to effectively support lyrics that reflect a parallel tension in Norwegian culture. "En sang om fly" functions as an extended metaphor for Norwegian culture in general, but instead of broadly focusing on the political implications of this culture, it is the singer's personal desires that come under scrutiny. By admitting the realities of global warming, Norwegians take another step from local towards a global orientation. But however cosmopolitan Norwegian culture becomes, most individuals fail to adapt their behavior towards sustainability in a global sense. This testifies to a failure to transition towards a future in harmony with the planetary environment. Norwegians may be engaged in the cause, but they are crucially still a part of the problem. They must therefore resist the temptations of both pastoral and apocalypse, resist the urge to fall into complacency, and instead realize the potential to take responsibility afforded by a still uncertain future.

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