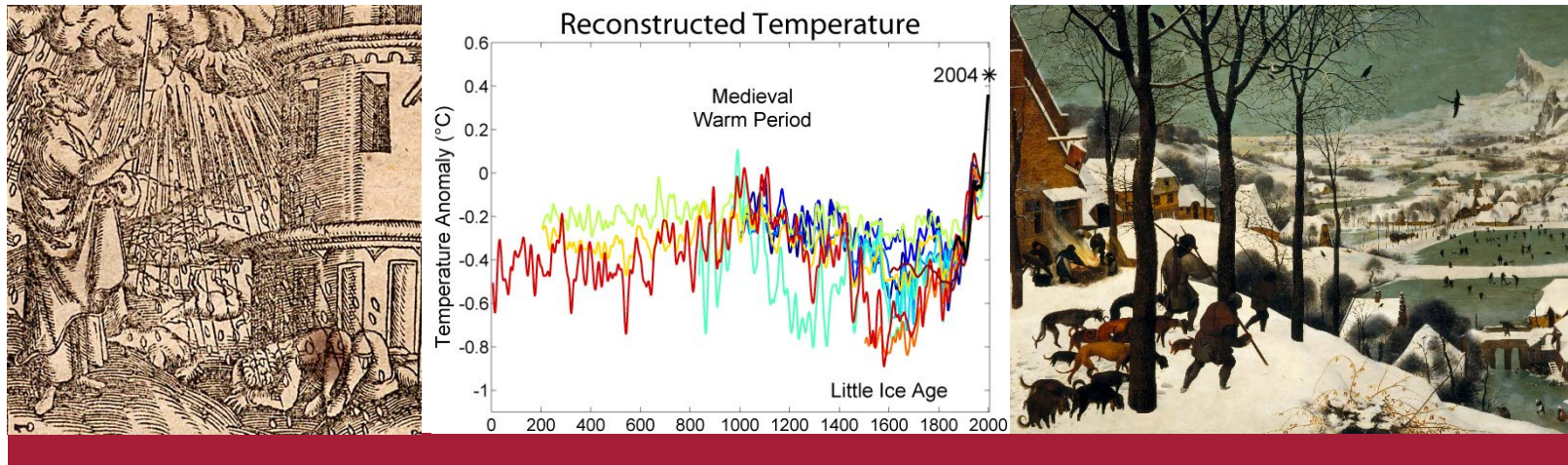




And all at once the clouds descend, Shed tears that never seem to end

Looking at climate change from early modern literature

The Human Side of Climate Change conference

Bergen (Norway), 16-17 October 2015

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Questions and structure

Questions

- How do the authors give language and meaning to climate change?
- Why might engagement with these texts still be of relevance for us today?

Structure

1. Humanities and sustainable development
2. The Little Ice Age and Early Modern Times
3. Experiencing climate change
4. Contextualisation
5. Giving language and meaning to climate change
6. The relevance of literary studies to climate change



1. Humanities and sustainable development

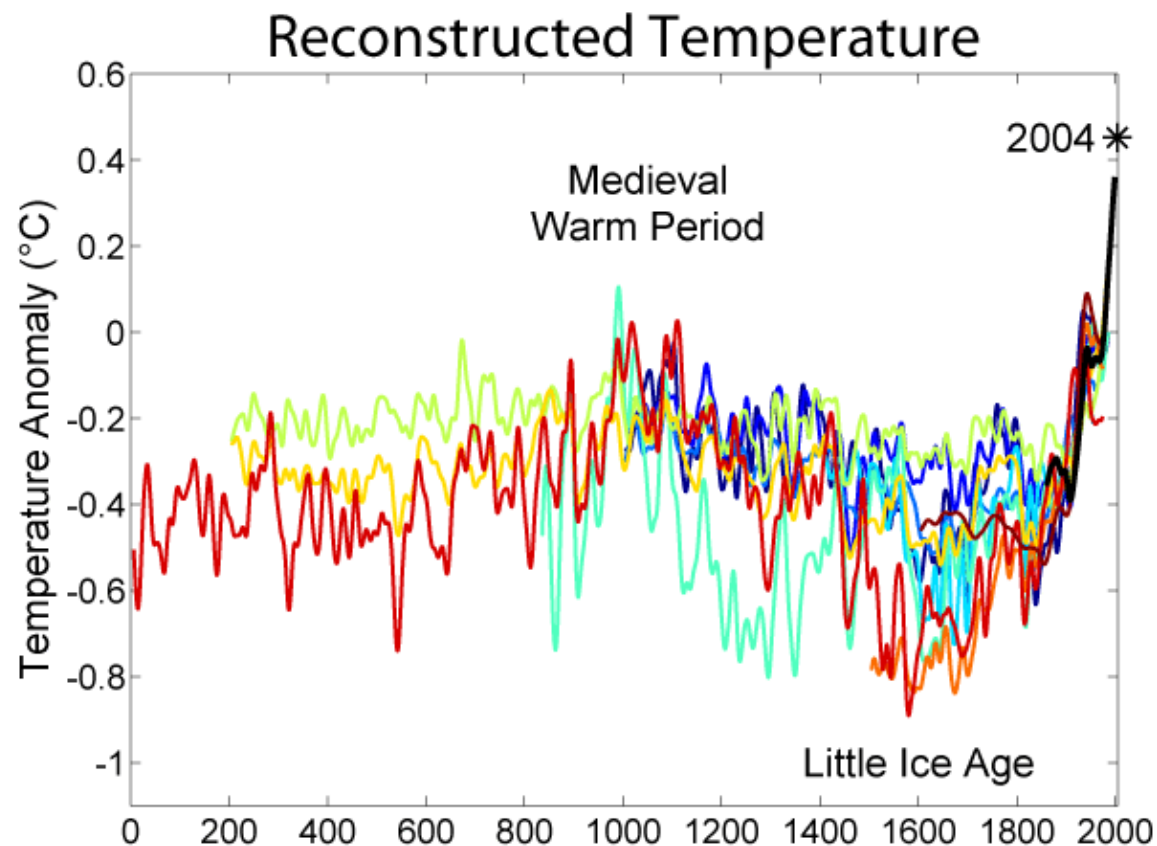
What might be a genuine contribution of traditional humanities to the research for sustainable development?

- **Background**
- The humanities are invited (and even summoned) to participate in transformative research for sustainable development.
- Humanities approach this invitation with scepticism:
 - They are more than just better communicators of scientific knowledge.
 - They do not offer solutions and cannot tell what to do.
- Solution-oriented sustainability sciences are criticised for focussing predominately on shaping reality (*Weltgestalten*) while ignoring the aspect of understanding reality (*Weltverstehen*).
- Positivist science is seen as one cause of non-sustainability ('End of Cartesian Dream').



2. Little Ice Times– Early Modern Climate Change

A period of relatively cold climate in the Northern hemisphere (1450-1840)





2. Little Ice Times – Early Modern Climate Change

- It is a time of religious tensions, wars and refugees, hunger and starvation, diseases, energy crises etc.
- The Early Modern Times are a transitional period towards the modern scientific worldview (New Sciences and the Cartesian dream).
- Authors of that time try to combine traditional discourses with emerging science discourses: reconciling the Book of God and the Book of Nature.

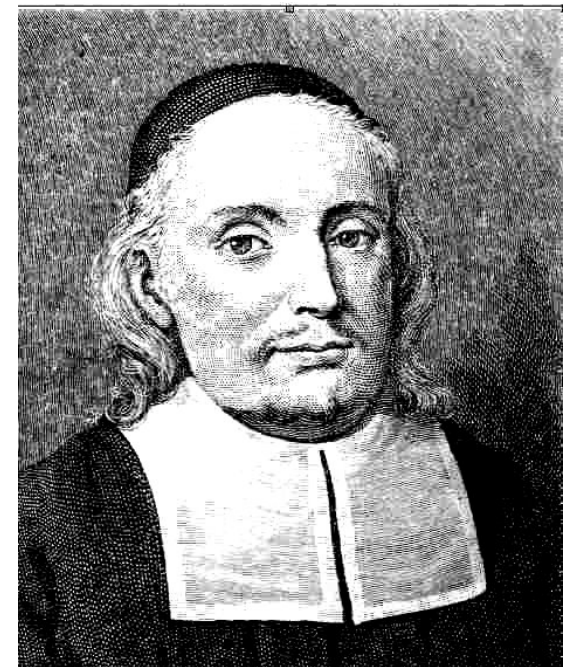


Authors

Simon Dach
(1605-1659)



Johann Rist
(1607-1667)





Geography





Poems

- **Simon Dach:** In kalter Winters-Zeit (1643) [*late and strong frost*]
- **Johann Rist:** Das Sechste Bußlied. Sehr nützlich zu singen/ wen etwan grosse lanwirige Hitze/ und gahr dürre Zeit einfellt (vor 1651) [*drought*]
- **Paul Gerhardt:** Buß- und Betgesang bei unzeitiger Nässe und betrübtem Gewitter (vor 1648) [*heavy rains, floods*]



3. Experiencing climate change

Late frost, drought, heavy precipitation

- Peasants cannot cultivate fields.
- Crop failures loom.
- Wild and farm animals do not find/get feed and suffer from heat and cold.
- Due to frost, fish and bird cannot be caught and sold; due to heat, they perish.
- Frost causes energy crisis as people have to heat more – and go and find dry wood.
- Heat causes danger of (forest) fires.
- Food and energy crisis especially affects the poorest of the poor.
- Darkness, uncertainty and shortages cause existential fear.
- People suffer from corrupt or failing state authorities.



4. Giving language and meaning to climate change

- I. Reference to Little Ice Age
- II. Lifeworld experiences of agrarian societies
- III. Biblical frame of reference
- IV. Songs and Melodies



I.

Reference to Little Ice Age

Simon Dach:

In kalter Winters-Zeit (1643)

Die Sonn ist hoch, der liebe Tag
Beynahe funffzehn Stunden,
Noch liegt das Erdreich wie es lag,
Durch strengen Frost gebunden. [...]

Der Himmel steht nicht wie er stund
Mit Land und See vertragen, [...]

Die Frühlings-Bohten kamen schon
Mit Singen angezogen,
Die sind zugleich mit ihrem Ton
Für rauher Lufft verflogen, [...]

**Glaser: Klimageschichte Mittel-
europas**

1643:

- Mild Winter
- Very cold spring:
 - In April: Three times as many freezing days
 - In mid-May: cold spell with frost, snow and storm from North to South with considerable damage to vegetation



II.

Lifeworld experiences of agrarian societies

Simon Dach:

Das Wild geht Krafftloß und verwirrt
Nach Nahrung in den Heyden,
Das Vieh ist traurig wie der Hirt
Und kann sich nirgends weyden,
Es blöckt und brüllt in grosser Schaar,
Man mus das **Stroh von Dächern gar**
Für sie zu Futter schneiden.

„Aber auch mancher Bauer drückte sich in die engste Ecke seiner Stube, um das **Brüllen der hungrigen Kühe** an der leeren Krippe nicht zu hören, um nicht hinauszusehen in die Hofstatt, wo der Schnee so dicht in den Bäumen hing, so hoch am Boden lag, kein Gräschen sich regte. Er hätte gerne geschlafen, um nicht an seine Bühne denken zu müssen, auf der kein Heu mehr war, durch die der Wind so schaurig pfiff; doch Sorgen sind Wächter, die nicht schlafen lassen. [...] Aber wie der arme Mann später, nachdem dieses Heu zu Ende war, das Stroh aus den Strohsäcken, **das Stroh vom Dach, wo man Strohdächer hatte**, fütterte, das sah selten jemand, denn das tat er im verborgenen.“

Jeremias Gotthelf: Die Wassernot im Emmental (1838)



III.

Biblical frame of reference

- Lev. 26,18ff.; Deut. 28, 23f.
 - covenant theology and faithfulness
 - list of curses ('I will make your heaven as iron, and your earth as brass')
- Num. 6, 24-26
 - blessing
 - face (eyes, sun, smile) vs. disguise (clouds, tears, blind sky, sorrows)
- Jonah 4, 10f.
 - God's love and mercy for his creation
 - animal suffering ('Was hat dir Vieh und Wild gethan, das neben uns muß flehen?')
- Ps. 65, 11
 - praise of creation ('Thou crownest the year with thy goodness; and thy paths drop fatness.')



IV. Songs and melodies

- **Dach:** “Es ist gewißlich an der Zeit” (“The Day is Surely Drawing Near”) (Bartholomäus Ringwaldt, 1586): *Dies ireda*
- **Rist:** “Kommet her zu mir” (“Come to me”) (Georg Grönewald, 1530): *hymn of consolation*
- **Gerhardt:** “Wenn wir in höchsten Nöten sein” (“When in the Hour of Utmost Need”) (Paul Ebner, 1560): *hymn of consolation*



4. Contextualisation: Lutheran *Frömmigkeitslied* after 1600

Beware of the historical context: The songs express a particular ecclesiastical and religious crisis in Lutheran territories of the 17th century.

- The years between 1580-1700 are considered to be the heyday of the Protestant hymn (Veit 2005).
- There was a thematic shift – away from hardships and persecution of the Protestant church towards misery of ordinary people.
- The proportion of hymns dealing with distresses of ordinary people grew disproportionately (war and peace, plagues and early death): within this text corpus, the number of songs about the weather grew particularly.
- The songs also express feelings of confinement by Lutherans in between Calvinism and Catholicism.



4. Contextualisation: Lutheran *Frömmigkeitslied* after 1600

- Themes:
 1. Extreme weathers are god's punishment for human sins: sins against god and sins against other humans.
 2. God is master of the weather: Extreme weathers are sign of his strength.
 3. The hymns paint two dimensions of god: furious and merciful.
 4. Extreme weathers as punitive measure calls humans to repentance, atonement and salvation.
 5. Extreme weathers are related to expectations of the final days.
- The songs are about the collective effort to overcome fear and distress.
- At the same time, there are laments and horror about the extent of god's damages to his creation. The hymn writers were anxious that god might exaggerate his punishment and drive people away from faith.
- In contrast to Calvinism (challenge) and Catholicism (good deeds), Lutherans had no means to influence god except by faith (*sola fide*, *sola gratia*).



5. Giving language and meaning to climate change

The texts ...

- paint the effects of climate change as (just) divine punishment;
- combine personal experiences with narratives of agrarian societies and sense-making based on the Old Testament and Lutheran Orthodoxy;
- show a way out of the crisis (penance, faith, conform to commandments);
- present the external, natural devastations as an image of inner, spiritual devastations;
- explain natural phenomenon as a social problem;
- explicitly serve as a means to come to terms with fear and uncertainties; as part of the liturgical practice the songs contribute to a collective crisis management.



6. The relevance of literary studies to climate change

- Verbalisation and poetisation had the important epistemological function of cognitively acquiring climate change because it made the phenomena communicatively available.
- Engagement with the early modern hymns allows
 - understanding erstwhile patterns of verbalisation and sense-making of climate change (overcoming the ‘narcism of present age’, P. v. Matt)
 - reflecting the patterns of the 21st century (‘creating unease’)
- The texts allows coping with contingency: There is a rest of unavailability in the human-nature-relationship:
 - Lutheran faith (‘Whoever lets only the dear God reign / and hopes in him at all times’)
 - ‘Antifragile: How to Live in a World We Don't Understand’ (N.N. Taleb)
- The relationship between shaping and understanding reality can be recalibrated: Dealing with literary texts adds a reflexive layer to climate change discourses (‘spaces of (normative) reflexivity’).



This is the end...

Thank you.