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“And here I must note briefly to you the uselessness of observation by instruments, or machines, instead of eyes” (7).

“If, in conclusion, you ask me for any conceivable cause or meaning of these things—I can tell you none, according to your modern beliefs; but I can tell you what meaning it would have borne to the men of old time” (8).

I chose these two quotes from Ruskin’s “The Storm-cloud of the Nineteenth Century” to discuss because they both contribute similarly to the idea of fact in relation to the conditions of industrial society. After the first quote, which he uses to introduce his argument, Ruskin says that while machines can measure the speed of the wind and the amount of light that is getting through the clouds, they were useless in measuring the *quality* of these observations. For example, machines couldn’t tell scientists if the wind blew “steadily,” or “trembling.” After the various descriptions he gives demonstrate his argument (that pollution has made the world unhealthy in a way immeasurable by machines), he writes the lines I quoted second. The key words I would like to emphasize are these: “I can tell you none [cause or meaning] *according to your modern beliefs.*”

In our discussion of *Hard Times,* we talked about how the prevailing opinion about fact was like that of Mr. Gradgrind, who saw value or use in nothing other than what can be measured in figures. The “modern beliefs” that Ruskin mentions are probably these demonstrated in *Hard Times;* with their instruments, the scientists could not tell the difference between clouds which Ruskin calls “those of beneficent rain” and “plague-clouds,” the clouds that choke the sun “out of the whole heaven.” Because machines cannot tell the different between these healthy aspects of weather and those caused by pollution, Ruskin deems them useless. Not only are the machines unable to measure the change in health of general climate, in relying on these measurements above all other observation in their pursuit of hard fact, the scientists also ignore the effect such changes have on people and the environment.

My impression from reading *Hard Times* and this lecture by Ruskin is that these scientists record everything they can in relation to figures, but fail to extrapolate these figures to analyze how industrial society affects everything around them, including (and especially) the weather (and, over time, the climate). Ruskin says that he can only say “what meaning it would have borne to the men of old time,” because this old time was one that valued the beauty and importance of man and nature, one which favored “truth” over hard fact.

The biggest question that I’ve been thinking about in relation to our discussion of fact is this: what difference, if any, is there between fact (especially hard fact) and truth (especially in relation to our romantic writers)?