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Principal Investigator: Kristen Pond
Department: English
College/School: Arts and Sciences
Project Title: The Private and the Public Face of Harriet Martineau's Sympathetic Sociology

Abstract:
Harriet Martineau was a dynamic figure in the nineteenth-century, publishing on an astonishingly broad array of subjects, and often surprisingly in male-dominated fields. This archival research project examines Martineau’s How to Observe Manners and Morals (1838), often considered the first methodological study of how to classify societies, in conjunction with the correspondence she wrote in the months surrounding this publication. No one has examined the relationship between Martineau’s observations and comments in her private letters and how she shapes those same observations and comments in the public form of her published sociological treatise.

Drawing from the archival materials at the Bancroft Library at UC Berkeley, this project aims to highlight the kind of rhetorical choices Martineau made when writing about her observations and experiences in letters to her publisher and her brother, and the official account of her travel in How to Observe. Martineau’s negotiation of the public/private divide, her rhetorically savvy blending of the gendered realms of science and domesticity, and her theories for engaging sympathetically with difference helps to revise our sometimes simplistic conception of the Victorian period’s handling of these issues. Thus, this project provides a more comprehensive look at a key writer of the period by putting several of her more neglected texts into conversation with one another. In addition, this project reevaluates our assumptions about the function of sympathy in the nineteenth century by comparing how one writer comments on and enacts sympathy in both the public and private versions of her