Wonderful Adventures of Mrs Seacole in Many Lands (1857): colonial identity and the geographical imagination

Abstract

Rupprecht's contribution to this interdisciplinary reappraisal of imperial history recognises her previous research in the field. Bringing together leading international scholars from a variety of intellectual and disciplinary backgrounds, the book offers new ways of constructing, interpreting and analysing the history of the British Empire. The essays challenge many of the conventional approaches and efficacy of such constructs as 'metropole' and 'colony', establishing a historical discourse from more recently identified thematics, highlighting issues of methodology and research - the biographies included in the volume cross both continents and archives. Rupprecht interrogates the autobiography of 'Crimean heroine' Mary Seacole, who travelled from Kingston to Panama, then to Britain, to volunteer her services in the Crimean War. The research engages in both historical contextualisation and close textual analysis of Seacole's narrative, analysing the formation and representation of her colonial subjectivity. It focuses on the connected issues of autobiography, place, subjectivity and mobility in relation to the material conditions of her route across the globe. The analysis highlights the imperial military networks that structured a large part of her trajectory, arguing that Seacole's self-representation cannot be fully understood without taking into account the precariousness of historically and geographically contingent places to which she travelled and her sense of her reading audience. Part of this interdisciplinary project, encompassing historical and cultural geography, imperial history and life history, Rupprecht's text contributes to a fast-developing field of 'new imperial history'. The research reflects contemporary critical focus on issues of transnationalism, mobility and cross-cultural subject formation, challenging nationally oriented historical paradigms and developing a 'networked' conception of imperial spatiality. The focus on the interconnectedness of imperial spaces and projects reconfigures an understanding of place in terms of materially structured trajectories and imagined possibilities.
"Authority and the Public Display of Identity: Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands." Feminist Studies 20, no. 3 (fall 1994): 537-57. [In the following essay, Robinson discusses how Seacole negotiates her marginal identity as a Creole woman and describes the maneuvers necessary to become a prominent member of society in Victorian England.] Only twenty-four years after the "official" abolition of slavery in the British West Indies, Mary Seacole, "the yellow woman from Jamaica with the cholera medicine,"1 published Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands. This engaging a