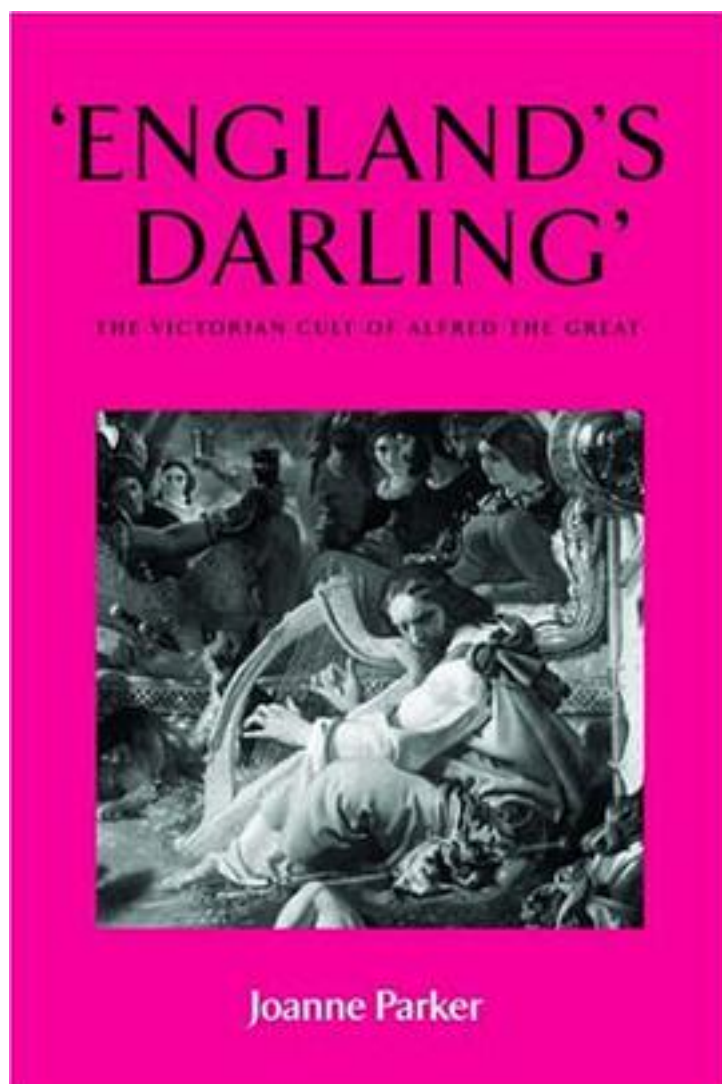


"England's Darling"



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During the last two decades, numerous studies have been devoted to the Victorian fascination with King Arthur, however. the figure of King Alfred has received almost no attention. For much of the nineteenth century, Alfred was as important as Arthur in the British popular imagination. A pervasive cult of the king developed which included the erection of at least four public statues, the completion of more than twenty-five paintings, and the publication of over a hundred texts, by authors ranging from Wordsworth to minor women writers. By 1852, J.A. Froude could describe Alfred's life as 'the favourite story in English nurseries'; in 1901, a national holiday marked the thousandth anniversary of his death, organised by a committee including Edward Burne Jones, Arthur Conan Doyle and Thomas Hughes. England's darling sets out to answer the questions that must arise in the face of such nineteenth-century enthusiasm for a long-dead king. It addresses a genuine gap in the literature on Victorian medievalism in particular and cultural history in general and argues that knowledge of the cult of Alfred is crucial to understanding the Victorian cultural map. The book examines the ways in which Alfred was rewritten by nineteenth-century authors and artists, and asks how beliefs about the Saxon king's reign and achievements related to nineteenth-century ideals about leadership, law, religion, commerce, education and the Empire. The book concludes by addressing the most interesting enigma in Alfred's reception history: why is the king no longer 'England's darling'? A fascinating study that will be enjoyed by scholars of history, cultural history, literature and art history.

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