



Law, Literature, and the Transmission of Culture in England, 1837-1925

Cathrine O. Frank

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Focusing on the last will and testament as a legal, literary, and cultural document, Cathrine O. Frank examines fiction of the Victorian and Edwardian eras alongside actual wills, legal manuals relating to their creation, case law regarding their administration, and contemporary accounts of 'curious wills' in periodicals. Her study begins with the Wills Act of 1837 and poses two basic questions: What picture of Victorian culture and personal subjectivity emerges from competing legal and literary narratives about the will, and how does the shift from realist to modernist representations of the will accentuate a growing divergence between law and literature? Frank's examination of works by Emily Bronte, George Eliot, Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins, Anthony Trollope, Samuel Butler, Arnold Bennett, John Galsworthy, and E.M. Forster reveals the shared rhetorical and cultural significance of the will in law and literature while also highlighting the competition between these discourses to structure a social order that emphasized self-determinism yet viewed individuals in relationship to the broader community. Her study contributes to our knowledge of the cultural significance of Victorian wills and creates intellectual bridges between the Victorian and Edwardian periods that will interest scholars from a variety of disciplines who are concerned with the laws, literature, and history of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

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