Vanity Fair, Bleak House And Felix Holt Essay, Research Paper

Queen Victoria and her consort, Prince Albert, established the idea of a sound family life as a prime value of the mid-century years. In Vanity Fair, Bleak House, and Felix Holt we see a very different idea in family rapport.

In Vanity Fair, the Sedley family gives us a good example of a family that did not see sound family life as a prime value. Though both Amelia and Jos live good lives, Amelia going to a respectable girls’ academy, Miss Pinkerton’s, and Jos living abroad in India, neither of them is exceptional, though, an outsider might have seen them so. Amelia, whom we see being well liked by many and a seemingly lovely girl, is not as perfect as she seems. A major fault that Amelia has is her ideas about love. Though we see this more as the novel progresses, we see her relationship with George and see it more as an infatuation then a genuine love. She is in love with the appearance of George and the idea of George more than the person that he actually is. In chapter 3 we see Jos cruelly tricking Becky into eating spicy food which she has never tasted before. As for Mr. Sedley, he is not a loving father. He is very mean to Jos, calling him names and making fun of him at any given opportunity. Mr. Sedley is thoughtless, nasty and cruel. To an outsider like Becky, one’s initial reaction to the Sedleys is that they are an ideal family, but once one is submerged into their world he/she begins to see the truth behind their fa?ade. Becky also idealizes them initially because she is an orphan. She comes from a family less fortunate than the Sedleys and therefore sees them as a perfect. Now that she is alone she must work to take care of herself. She is very unhappy about this because she likes being with the Sedleys and also because she has set her sights on Jos as a potential mate.

In Bleak House the first encounter we have with a family or non-family is with Sir Leicester and Lady Dedlock. Not only are they are thirty years different in age but they have no children. We can infer that this bothers Lady Dedlock because of her reaction to the neighboring family who seem loving and caring.

We become acquainted with Esther was raised by her godmother who treated her horribly. She constantly reminded Esther that she was her mother’s ruin because of the circumstances under which she was born. Esther grew up without love and feeling worthless. After her godmother’s death she becomes a ward of the crown and is taken care of by Mr. Jarndyce. (There are also other ward of the crown, Rich and Ada, whom Mr. Jarndyce takes care of.)

The Jellyby family is quite dysfunctional. Mrs. Jellyby is only interested in her charity work. She ignores her children and her home leaving them in squalor. The house and the children are filthy. The only child who she pays attention to is Caddy, whom she uses as her secretary.

Mrs. Pardiggle also does charity work, missionary work to be exact. Her five sons dislike her and are ferocious with discontent because she forces them to do that work as well and to contribute money to it.

One more example of a non-family situation is the Neckett family. After Mr. Neckett dies, Charlotte, better known as Charlie, must take care of her siblings. Though they adore her this is far from what we would see as the ideal family situation.

In Felix Holt the first family we encounter is the Transome family. They are quite dysfunction from the very beginning. We are told that Mr. and Mrs. Transome have not seen their son in many years nor have they ever met their grandson, this alone makes us begin to wonder what kind of familial ties they have. After Harold arrives he is nothing but mean and disrespectful to his mother and father. He arrives without his son, he bosses his mother around rearranging everyone’s living quarters in the house to suit his own needs, and he makes fun of his father who is not well. Proving further the lack of family values in this household, we come to find out that Mr. Transome is not even Harold’s father but the neighbor Mr. Jermyn in fact is.

These examples taken from Vanity Fair, Bleak House, and Felix Holt show us that these novels, though written in the time of Queen Victoria, did not emanate the family values that she and Prince Albert tried to institute. The families portrayed in these novels are quite opposite. These families were far from having a sound family life; one might question calling them families at all.