Romantic Criticism of Shakespeare

Key Features and Concepts

Introduction

- **Romantic criticism emerged in the late 18th–19th century.**
- **It rejected neoclassical rules and emphasized imagination, emotion, and organic unity.**
- **Key critics: Coleridge, Hazlitt, Lamb, Schlegel.**

Imagination over Rules

- **Romantic critics rejected strict rules.**
- **Shakespeare seen as a natural genius.**
- **Coleridge emphasized creative imagination.**

Organic Unity

- **A play grows like a living organism.**
- **All elements are interconnected.**
- **Not mechanical but natural development.**

Character Analysis

- **Focus on psychological depth.**
- **Characters seen as real human beings.**
- **Hazlitt praised Shakespeare's lifelike characters.**

Emotion and Subjectivity

- **Importance of feelings and personal response.**
- **Literature judged by emotional impact.**
- **Reader's experience becomes central.**

Mixed Genres

- Defense of mixing tragedy and comedy.
- Life itself is complex.
- Schlegel supported this idea.

Reading vs Performance

- Charles Lamb preferred reading.
- Imagination works more freely than on stage.

Historical Context

- **Shakespeare as product of Elizabethan age.**
- **Appreciation of historical and cultural elements.**

Rejection of Moral Judgement

- **Focus on artistic beauty.**
- **Not primarily moral teaching.**
- **Truth to human nature emphasized.**

Universal Appeal

- Shakespeare represents universal human emotions.
- Relevant across time and culture.

Conclusion

Romantic criticism shifted focus:

- Rules → Imagination
- Structure → Organic unity
- Plot → Character
- Judgement → Appreciation

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