**Coleridge's Poems The "Willing Suspension of Disbelief"**

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, besides being a supreme poet in his own right, he is also well-known for ushering in the Romantic age of poetry in England. Along with his friend William Wordsworth, Coleridge wrote and published Lyrical Ballads, a work that not only contained many of the two poets' poetic works, but also included essays on the nature and craft of poetry. When creating or reading poetry, Coleridge called for "That willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith." By this he meant that the reader will accept the poem on its own terms, temporarily giving over to the author's vision of the world long enough to appreciate the work. However, no phrase in the language has acquired such wide and universal popularity, and has had such a profound impact on subsequent literary theory as Coleridge's phrase, “Willing suspension of disbelief”.

Coleridge uses the phrase in connection with his account in Chapter XIV of the Biographia Literaria of the origin and genesis of the Lyrical Ballads. He writes:

*‘In this idea originated the plan of the Lyrical ballads; in which it was agreed that my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural or at least romantic; yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment which constitutes poetic faith.’*

Thus, he was to treat of characters supernatural, which are incredible and improbable and which under normal circumstances we would not believe in but the treatment was to be such that as long as we were reading his poems, there would be, “a willing suspension of disbelief”, and we would believe for the moment in what is essentially incredible and improbable. In other words, the treatment should be such as would send the judgment of readers to sleep, so that they would pursue the poem with delight.

A fine example of this is Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner", in which the reader (along with the targeted Wedding Guest of the poem) must accept the Ancient Mariner's tale at face value and assume the old man is telling the truth about his experiences. Coleridge builds this "willing suspension of disbelief" by beginning the Mariner's tale in familiar territory--a ship exploring the frozen wastes of the ocean--and slowly but inexorably drawing the reader into the Mariner's more supernatural encounters.

"Christabel" follows the same pattern, beginning with the allegedly violated woman being rescued by the title character, but eventually giving way to the so-called victim's malignant (evil in nature, malevolent) supernatural identity. A similar "suspension of disbelief" occurs in modern literary genres such as "magical realism" and horror, where the supernatural or unbelievable elements are framed in mundane terms and possess their own internal logic.