

## **“Those eyes of hers! They were a devil’s.”: the Body as a Propagator of Ideological Monstrous Conditions in Richard Marsh’s *The Beetle***

**Objective:** Demonstrate how the physical transmission of monstrosity exposes preoccupations about ideological contamination and national identity in Richard Marsh’s novel *The Beetle*.

### **Summary:**

Monstrosity is defined as a situation of difference from standards. In this sense, this condition is presented in the individual in physical, psychological and symbolic forms which are associated to the context in which they are created. This means, monstrosity is influenced by historical particularities such as power conflicts, or social distress, for example. In addition, monstrosity exposes the vices and fears related to these conflicts—monsters become the embodiment of the ideologically questionable, shameful, or expurgated, and their fate is defined by their particular condition.

In *The Beetle*, monstrosity is either inherent or acquired; if assimilated, individuals become the physical and moral embodiment of social conflict. Their condition is transmitted through different mechanisms; however, physical contact deserves special attention. Physical transmission of monstrosity transforms victims into an extension of the monster that has contaminated them—ideologically, victims embody the sins and defects of their own society, and fate punishes them for their ostracized, sinister condition.

The use of specific parts of the body to transmit the monstrous condition reflects a necessity to visualize ideological contamination—through physical transmission, the individual reinforces views about ideology contained in the monster. Examples of physical transmission of monstrosity will be analyzed in *The Beetle* in order to expose Victorian tensions about identity and power. Eyes, mouth and skin work not only as contaminating agents—they reveal ideological preoccupations about degeneration and national identity in Victorian Britain.

### **Relevance:**

*The Beetle* is not only a novel about fear of a monstrous being—it is a brilliant example of narrative production that exposes the imaginary of imperial authority during Victorian times. Political, economic, and social mechanisms of control exposed throughout the text evince not only British perceptions of superiority, but also anxieties about loss of dominant identity. The novel develops monstrosity as a moral condition, inherently connected to the perception of imperialism and the foreign other. In the novel, monstrosity reveals a conceptual character whose objective is focused on the construction of new ideological positions about the foreigner as a threat to nationalism.

In addition, there is still a tendency to view popular literature as *The Beetle* exclusively as an aesthetic genre, devoid of any deeper social and cultural connections to its time. For this reason, this investigation attempts to demonstrate that non-canonical texts, and more specifically, one that has been traditionally considered an inferior narrative work by conventional standards such as *The Beetle*, can expose the complex relation between different discourses that depict a historical reality rarely exposed in mainstream accounts. This novel develops topics that are particularly relevant even in today's context, in which massive migration generates deep controversy in former imperialist countries. Finally, this research work aims to contribute to new lines of investigation in the academic environment of Costa Rica and the region by focusing on the often ignored sensational genre through theories on monstrosity.

**Descriptors:** Monstrosity theory, Abjection, Corporality, Cultural Studies, Transgression, Imperialism.

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