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Vampires: Breathing Life into the Undead “Monsters” of Mythology

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Vampires: Breathing Life into the Undead “Monsters” of Mythology

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Course: FFC-100-27

Variations by Region & Period

Asia

- **Ancient China:** The legend of Jiang Shi, known as the Chinese “hopping” vampire, tells of a stiff type of zombie-esque creature incapable of walking normally, hence the “hopping” label
 - They rest in coffins during the day and feast on unsuspecting victims at night
 - Like in the Mesopotamian myths, they only feed on their victims’ life force

Europe

- **Ancient Greece:** The oldest known Greek vampire myth is about Ambrogio, a man who fell in love with a girl the god Apollo also loved and became cursed and blessed with vampiric qualities.
 - He drank his lover’s blood so that her body died but her soul became immortal; this is the earliest depiction of vampire reproduction
 - The Greeks also had a handful of monsters who also fit the vampire description, including Empousai (seductive shapeshifters), Lamia (a child-eating monster), and striges (nocturnal birds created from cursed cannibals)
- **The Middle Ages:** The Black Death (a plague that killed 30-60% of Europe’s population) and mass hysteria during this period prompted the rapid spread of vampire myths
- **Romania:** *Dracula* aside, in older Romanian tales, Strigoi were nightmarish creatures who were divided into two categories: living and dead
 - The living Strigoi were witches who sent out souls to drink the blood of animals and sucked the blood from humans themselves
 - Dead Strigoi were soulless husks capable of rising from their graves to suck blood and attack their family members

The Americas

- **The United States, 19th Century:** The concept that an epidemic could be a sure sign of vampirism rose again during a tuberculosis outbreak in Rhode Island
 - Townspeople living in Exeter desperately wanted to find the source of their problems, so they began to unearth the dead for answers
 - The body of Mercy Brown, a young girl who had been buried only two months prior to being dug up again, surprised them because her body had not yet decomposed; a local doctor dismissed this claim but the townspeople concluded that she was a vampire

Modern Works

- ***Buffy the Vampire Slayer (1997)*:** A franchise about Buffy, a high school student dedicated to slaying vampires
- ***Twilight (2005)*:** A fantasy romance series focused on Bella, a human teenager who falls in love with a vampire named Edward and befriends a werewolf (Jacob)
- ***Hotel Transylvania (2012)*:** A whimsical 3D animated series in which Count Dracula runs a hotel for monsters
- ***Carmilla (2014)*:** A web series hosted by Laura, a freshman whose party-loving roommate mysteriously disappears and is replaced by a brooding, angst vampire



What Makes Monsters?

mon·ster
/ˈmɒnstər/
noun

noun: **monster**; plural noun: **monsters**

1. an imaginary creature that is typically large, ugly, and frightening.
2. an inhumanly cruel or wicked person.
3. a person, typically a child, who is rude or badly behaved.
4. a thing or animal that is excessively or dauntingly large.
5. a congenitally malformed or mutant animal or plant.

The classification of vampires as monsters has shifted since their initial appearances in fiction. This change can mostly be attributed to the analysis of morality as a whole; as humans have become more complex (particularly in literature), the monsters humans create have developed in the same way.

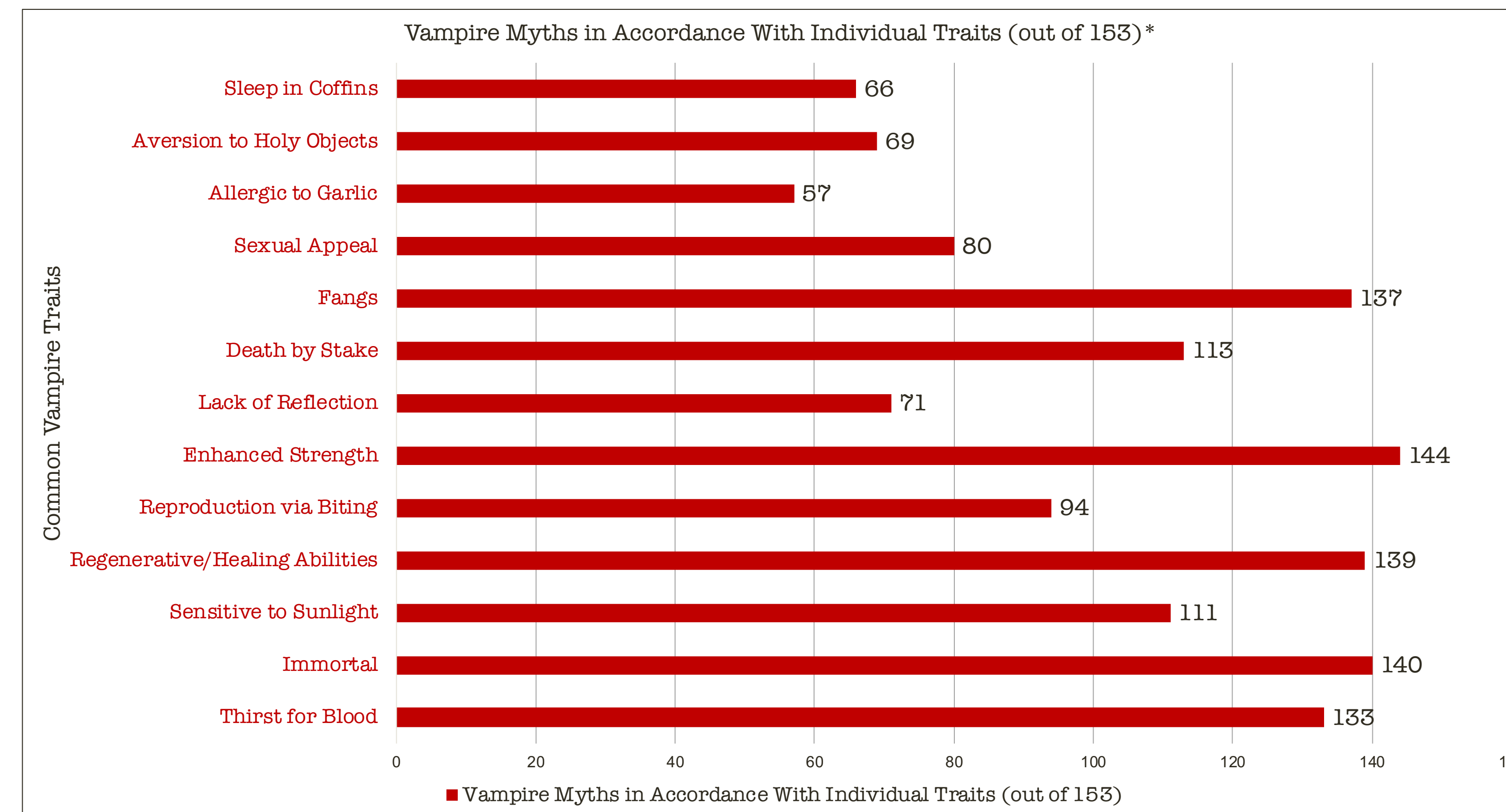
“Good” Versus “Evil”

- Older vampire characters created while earlier civilizations were still reliant on the “good” or “evil” archetypes are incredibly grotesque and animalistic
- Many of these vampires were applied to real life, including:
 - Warning people to avoid committing terrible deeds/acts while they were alive in order to avoid the lives these bloodsuckers lived—or, well, didn’t live
 - Painting certain groups as “good” and others as “evil”
- These terrifying vampires personified superficial worldly struggles in otherworldly bodies

Becoming Human

- Modern vampires—particularly those found between the pages of YA novels—look like humans and undergo human struggles
- As humanity has stepped away from fearing supernatural powers and solutions for the unknown have been discovered through science, we have shifted towards more contemporary issues
- Newer vampires grapple with their own morality (and tend to vary more on that spectrum), a trait that was much less explored when the first vampires were created
- Vampires fit into a wider range of archetypes; instead of only serving as the horrific antagonist, vampires are now portrayed as bold heroes, goofy or misunderstood teenagers, and whimsical teachers
- Today, monsters are monsters because of their inner flaws and character traits

Most Common Traits



Appeal

Morality, Political/Religious Agendas, and Other Complex Topics (Oh My!)

- The Ancient Greeks expanded their beliefs on the origin of vampires to include people who lived “immorally,” such as prostitutes, cannibals, and those who practiced witchcraft
 - “Lamia,” a word and name used in Ancient Greece originating from their myth about a child-eating monster, was used to terrify children who misbehaved
- *Carmilla*, a 19th century novella, featured a lesbian vampire as the antagonist
- In Romania, people who were born with certain physical or situational flaws were considered doomed; however, those who were born this way could resolve the issue through baptism

Tragedy Within Storytelling

- In many ancient civilizations (especially those that prioritized good storytelling), the circumstances under which someone may become a vampire included stillborn babies, those who made improper offerings to the gods, mothers who did not survive pregnancy, death during battle, improper burials, etc.
- The German vampire was created by suicide or accidental deaths

Etiology

- Etiology is used in the context of myths or tales that were developed to explain the unexplainable, such as diseases, natural disasters, and everything in between
- Bubonic Plague victims who developed bleeding mouth lesions were believed to be vampires

Bizarre Outliers and Progressive Efforts

- In some Romanian myths, melons and pumpkins could turn into vampires if they were left in the house too long
- Some vampires in *The Sims* and *Twilight* are vegetarians
- Marceline the Vampire Queen from the 2D animated show *Adventure Time* is one of the first queer fictional characters with a major role in all of animation

