
Controls over Body: How Politics Operates the Body in *Vampire Academy* Universe

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ABSTRACT

The concept of body politics underpins the rigid, oppressive class system in Richelle Mead's Vampire Academy (VA) series, shaping how power is distributed and maintained across social groups. This study examines how power is enacted on individual bodies through mechanisms of regulation, control, and normalization that extend beyond formal authority. Drawing on the theoretical framework of Scheper-Hughes and Lock, particularly their notion of the body as a political and social reality, this research situates the body as a key site where ideology, morality, and power converge. Within this framework, social norms are shown to exert a disciplinary force that often surpasses the effectiveness of legal or institutional governance. Using qualitative textual analysis, the study examines narrative events, character interactions, and emotional responses within the Vampire Academy series, focusing on the lived bodily experiences of Moroi, Dhampir, and Humans. Special attention is given to how emotional regulation, physical discipline, and moral expectations are unevenly imposed across these groups. The analysis reveals that social stability in the VA universe is sustained by the interplay of religious morality and hierarchical class structures. Moral control manifests through the internalization of Christian-influenced ethical values, particularly those related to purity, sacrifice, and duty, which are reinforced through emotions such as guilt, fear, and obligation. At the same time, the class system dictates acceptable physical behaviour and bodily practices, especially in the militarization and instrumentalization of Dhampir bodies and the privileged protection of Moroi bodies. These dynamics demonstrate that power in the VA series functions most effectively not through overt violence alone, but through the internalization of norms that discipline both body and mind. Ultimately, the study argues that body politics in Vampire Academy serve as a critical mechanism for maintaining the existing social order by transforming domination into a normalized and emotionally accepted condition.

Keywords: body politic; control; Vampire Academy

INTRODUCTION

Bodily control and regulation serve as the basis for the rigid and hierarchical class system depicted in the VA series. Dhampir bodies are treated as military commodities, brutally trained from an early age to serve as instruments of defense for the Moroi. The "They Come First" ideology forces Dhampirs to suppress their survival instincts for the safety of their masters. In contrast, Moroi bodies are depicted as beautiful but fragile vessels of magic, making them

utterly dependent on their guardians. For Moroi, control is more internal, a struggle to master the elements of nature without losing their sanity. The biological aspect of a vampire bite, which releases endorphins, complicates this dynamic, resulting in an addictive form of control that binds humans and Dhampirs in a seductive, physical submission. However, in Strigoi form, the permanent loss of control over the soul is brought about by bodily transformation through murder, turning people into predators without ethics. Furthermore, the use of spirit magic enables control beyond the physical, including the mind and emotions. The boundaries of privacy between the protagonists, Rose and Lissa, dissolve through the psychic bond, demonstrating that complete control over oneself—both physically and mentally—is a luxury that remains elusive amid the demands of politics and magical destiny in VA. Those controls took over the body, compelled it to obey, and made it politics.

Body politics is a concept that links the body to power across domains such as anatomy, sexuality, gender, death, population, and race. This relationship is also about power and control. Scheper-Hughes and Lock cite Douglas (1966), who argued that when a community perceives a threat, it responds by implementing social controls that regulate group boundaries. External threats that attempt to infiltrate and pollute the group become the focus of regulation and surveillance. When the body is under threat of attack and vulnerable, a purge of traitors and social deviants occurs. Threats to a social group's existence can be real or imagined. Even when the threat is real but the attacker is unknown, witchcraft becomes a metaphor or cultural idiom for the crime (Scheper-Hughes & Lock, 1987). Scheper-Hughes's concept of threat resonates with Michael Taussig's (1984) notion of the body as a site of political signification through violence and terror. The body becomes a canvas on which power dramatizes its authority, instilling fear and obedience through the spectacle of pain and death. Taussig's "death chamber" illustrates how bodily suffering becomes a cultural tool for domination, a place where terror is not only physical but also epistemological—changing how the body is perceived and governed. This view aligns with Foucault's biopolitical framework but accentuates the emotional and symbolic dimensions of bodily violations.

In times of crisis, societies generally reproduce and socialize the bodies they desire. Culture becomes a discipline that provides codes and social scripts for the domestication of individual bodies in accordance with social and political needs and orders (Scheper-Hughes & Lock, 1987). In the medical world, Scheper-Hughes and Lock cite Foucault's analysis of the roles of medicine, criminal justice, psychiatry, and other social sciences in producing new forms of power/knowledge over the body. The proliferation of disease categories and labels in medicine and psychiatry stems from a limited definition of normal (thus creating a sick and abnormal/deviant majority). Sex and reproduction are also politically redefined, producing a gender hierarchy that naturalizes inequality. In line with Scheper-Hughes and Lock's arguments, Laqueur (1986) argues that even seemingly objective medical knowledge is rooted in ideological narratives that shape what bodies are and how they are permitted to function in society.

There is a strong relationship between the body and body politics that leads to considerations of regulation and control not only of individuals but also of populations, including sexuality, gender, and reproduction (what Foucault calls bio-power). Malthus, as quoted in Gallagher, Scheper-Hughes, and Lock (1986) on population, recast the equation of a healthy body with a healthy body politics, framing unfettered individual fertility as a sign of a weak social organism. State power depends on the ability to control physical potential and fertility. Thus, a healthy human body (including feelings and desires) becomes a problem and the center of control of human sexuality across various disciplines. Control over the body (individual and collective) becomes a central concept in body politics, as Scheper-Hughes and Lock argue that its stability lies in its ability to regulate society and discipline the physical body. Many institutions are used to control and institutionalize society, producing "tame"

bodies and minds to maintain collective stability, health, and social well-being. The ideas of Taussig, Laqueur, and Foucault reinforce Schepers-Hughes's work, developing a critique of how the body is transformed not only through personal experience or organic change, but also through systems of meaning, classification, and control. The body emerges as a site of power enacted and contested, where personal identity, social sense, and political structures converge. Drawing on Schepers-Hughes and Lock's postulates on body politics, this study reveals how power and control govern Moroi, Dhampir, and Human societies in Richelle Mead's *VA* series.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach to examine body politics in the *VA* series, focusing on the body, power, and control within the fictional narrative. This methodology is based on Schepers-Hughes and Lock's theory of the political body, which states that the political body operates within the framework of control that governs the individual's body. The primary data sources for this study are the novel series *Vampire Academy* (VA), *Frostbite* (FB), *Bloodlines* (BP), and *Last Sacrifice* (LS) by Richelle Mead. The data consist of textual units that describe the behavior, emotions, and interactions of characters from three classes: Moroi, Dhampir, and Human. Overall, this methodology aims to uncover the rules and controls that govern society in this fictional world and to demonstrate how political stability depends on the system's capacity to discipline the physical bodies and minds of its members.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

MORALS

In *VA*, Moroi and Dhampir live in an area far removed from humans. They establish a small town in a remote part of America. Mead explains that the Moroi originally came from Eastern Europe, which accounts for the distinctive European surnames, such as Dragomir, Ozera, and Dashkov. Moroi built buildings with distinctive Gothic characteristics—stone structures with spacious rooms that resemble church architecture.

“This school wasn’t as old as the ones back in Europe, but it had been built in the same style. The buildings boasted elaborate, almost churchlike architecture, with high peaks and stone carvings.” (VA, 18)

Moroi still maintain Gothic architecture in their homes, schools, and administrative buildings, and, of course, in churches. Churches are important in Moroi life because they are orthodox. Through Moroi characters, Mead demonstrates religious control over their bodies. Within a spiritual framework, the body is regarded as a potential locus of sin, requiring moral discipline to control it. Moroi, as a group endowed with special abilities from birth, namely magical powers derived from their senses, cannot necessarily use them for pleasure or personal gain or display them publicly. The magical abilities inherent in Moroi bodies are controlled by rules to prevent misuse. This is evident in Lissa Dragomir's narrative, which holds that using her spiritual skills to eradicate Strigoi is wrong. Even Oksana, the Moroi whom Rose met in Russia while searching for Dimitri, who shared Lissa's spirit abilities, felt deeply guilty for using compulsion to learn why Rose had come to Russia.

“Those rules are stupid. If we used magic as a weapon instead of just for warmth and fuzzy shit, Strigoi wouldn’t keep killing so many of us.”

"It's wrong," she said firmly. "Magic is a gift. It's peaceful."

"Only because they say it is. You're repeating the party line we've been fed our whole lives." He stood up and paced the small space of the attic. (VA, 97)

"I'm sorry," she said. "I hate doing this to people... (BP, 403)

Oksana and Lissa's views on Moroi power reveal a hidden moral dimension. Ethics is defined as a set of moral principles (Merriam-Webster, 2004), and morality concerns the good and bad of human actions. Morality became the soul of the Middle Ages. After the collapse of the Roman Empire, polytheism in local gods was replaced by Christianity. Under the influence of Christianity, ethics and morality were brought into the social life of medieval society. Mead brings Christian morality to bear on the good and bad actions of characters from the Moroi, Dhampir, and human worlds. Christian morality centers on God's love. Love is the main principle of ethics, norms, and behavior, referred to as the Golden Rule (Fayzulloeva, 2022). Mead shows this love in the character of Lissa. Armed with spiritual abilities that can heal sick bodies and revive the dead, Lissa helps Rose after an accident that causes her death. Lissa uses her spiritual skills to restore Rose and even brings the Strigoi Dimitri back to life as a dhampir, a manifestation of her love for others. Mead presents Lissa as the savior and makes her the chosen character to lead the Moroi and dhampir nations in VA. Through Lissa's body, Mead shows that morality is not only understood as a guide to right and wrong but also as a socially constructed system for determining what is acceptable, who is legitimate, and who deserves to lead or is excluded.

Mead also depicts dhampirs like Rose and Dimitri as bodies subject to religious moral standards. Rose's grief and guilt after accidentally injuring and killing Victor Dashkov, a fugitive criminal, are conveyed when she says, *"Oh God. Oh God. All this time, I denied it, but it's true: I am a murderer." 'Don't think about that yet,' said Sonya (LS, 305)*. Moreover, Dimitri felt the same way the sorrow he experienced for having killed so many Strigoi to protect the Moroi he guarded.

"Do you feel guilty about it?" "Hmm?"

"Killing them. You said in the van that it was the right thing to do, but it still bothers you. It's why you go to church, isn't it? I see you there, but you aren't really into the services."

He smiled, surprised and amused I'd guessed another secret about him. "How do you know these things? I'm not guilty exactly...just sad sometimes. All of them used to be human or Dhampir or Moroi. It's a waste, that's all, but as I said before, it's something I have to do. Something we all have to do. Sometimes it bothers me, and the chapel is a good place to think about those kinds of things." (VA, 240-241)

The guilt and sadness felt by Dimitri and Rose stem from Christian morality's control over love for others, even though they killed criminals. Guilt is one of the strongest emotional responses an individual experiences after committing or believing they have committed a wrong. In the context of religious morality, guilt functions not only as a psychological reaction but also as an emotional regulatory system that connects the conscience to divine law. Guilt serves as a tool of inner correction and a mechanism of social and religious control. However, guilt is a social emotion shaped by the norms and expectations of a moral community. A person feels guilty not only for breaking God's law but also for failing to function socially, as Durkheim (1995) argued. This means that religion is not simply about the divine or the supernatural but is fundamentally about social cohesion. Durkheim saw religious beliefs and rituals as expressions of a community's collective consciousness of shared values and norms. Thus, guilt underpins religion by encouraging moral conformity and motivating believers to seek redemption and spiritual self-development.

Moral control also occurs in human groups, as exemplified by Sidney Sage, the alchemist. Mead offers a different perspective on Sidney Sage. Through Sidney, Mead situates

the Moroi and Dhampir in a supernatural context, characterizing them as dark creatures that should not be present in human life. According to Wotherspoon (2010), vampire legends arose from human fear of death or of what happens after death. This fear has led to the classification of creatures such as vampires as superstition since prehistoric times. Since the advent of Christianity and the church's efforts to spread its teachings among the people, almost all mythology and superstition from the pre-Christian era have been condemned as the work of the devil. Early Christian bishop, theologian, and philosopher Augustine of Hippo explained how demons use bodies for evil purposes, "*Just as [the demon] can from the air form a body of any form and shape, and assume it to appear in it visibly: so, in the same way he can clothe any corporeal thing with any corporeal form, to appear therein*" (Wotherspoon, 2010). Thus, the vampire myth became associated with being the enemy of the good and was disseminated to the public, leading people to view vampires as evil. Sidney adhered to this belief, even though his job required him to address the problem of Moroi in the human environment; he did so to protect humanity from the creatures of darkness. "*Because it's our duty to God to protect the rest of humanity from evil creatures of the night.*" *Absentmindedly, her hand went to something at her neck. Her jacket mostly covered it, but a parting of her collar briefly revealed a golden cross.*" (BP, 29). The golden cross that Sidney wore around her neck symbolizes God's protection against creatures of darkness. Mead, through Sidney, presents a Christian view of vampires, adopting the demonization of vampires.

Religious morality in the *VA* series serves as a control that regulates the lives of moroi, dhampirs, and humans. At the same time, it frames spiritual danger and uses supernatural figures to reinforce worldly moral control. Fear of creatures perceived as originating from the world of darkness becomes a moral stage on which religious values are practiced, tested, and symbolically upheld. This demonstrates how deeply moral ideology can influence characters' behaviour in the *VA* series.

CLASS

Moroi, Dhampirs, and Humans are three distinct classes central to the *VA* series. The concept of class here is derived from Kerbo's (2012) Theory, which defines class as a grouping of individuals with similar positions and shared political and economic interests within a stratification system. Mead situates them within a hierarchical structure that the story's characters inhabit and adhere as seen in Kustantinah's findings (2025). Lissa Dragomir, Christian Ozera, Adrian Ivanskov, and Victor Daskov are members of the Moroi nobility; Rose Hathaway and Dimitri Belikov are dhampir guardians; and Sidney Sage and all the donors are human. Noble Moroi, the dominant class among dhampirs and humans, have rules that govern their behaviour and actions, as Lissa Dragomir experienced.

"The hell you do. Natalie stays out of that stuff."

"Natalie isn't going to inherit her family's title," she retorted. "I've already got it. I've got to be involved, start making connections. Andre"

"Liss," I groaned. "You aren't Andre." I couldn't believe she was still comparing herself to her brother." (*VA*, 49)

Lissa feels a responsibility to carry on her family's legacy as the sole surviving descendant after her parents and older brother died in a tragic accident. The word "must" she uttered reflected her awareness of the rules internalized in her mind and emotions. Unlike Lissa, Christian Ozera faced ostracism as a consequence of his parents' actions. Christian's parents were also among the leading Moroi nobles, but they chose to transform their bodies into Strigoi—another vampire body form forbidden by the Moroi. This decision led to their being hunted and killed. Their bodies were destroyed because they were considered a threat and a form of betrayal and

social deviance. The incident became a scandal and tarnished the Ozera family, leading to Christian's ostracization at St. Vladimir's.

"how hard it might be to be Christian. Most of the time, people treated him like he didn't exist. Like he was a ghost. They didn't talk to or about him. They just didn't notice him. The stigma of his parents' crime was too strong, casting its shadow onto the entire Ozera family." (VA, 55)

The stigma of his parents' crimes was too strong, casting a shadow over the entire Ozera family. Christian's friendlessness and inability to socialize were manifestations of the social sanctions imposed on him for his parents' violation of Moroi rules. Disobeying the body's rules was seen as a threat to other bodies. Dhampir bodies are also subject to regulations mapped onto their minds, behaviors, and actions. Through Rose's emotions, Mead shows how self-discipline is internalized in the body and mind.

*"The Strigoi would love to finish off the Dragomirs; you nearly enabled them to do it."
If she'd done her duty, she would have notified someone. If she'd done her duty, she would have kept you safe."
I snapped.
"I did do my duty!" I shouted, jumping up from my chair."* (VA, 21)

"The instinct to protect Moroi was so deeply ingrained in me that I couldn't even pause to worry about myself. Christian and Mia were the focus. They were the ones I had to get out of this mess." (FB, 206)

Rose's anger, as expressed by Mead in the text when she is deemed careless and not performing her duties as a guardian candidate properly, and her instinct to protect the Moroi when they are in danger demonstrate how Rose is politically constructed as a form of loyalty and obedience to the rules and forms of the body controlled by the royal power.

The same holds true for human characters. Mead represents the human class through Sidney Sage. He is depicted as an alchemist, a profession granted only to humans by the Moroi to serve their interests in the human world. Sidney is portrayed as an obedient, responsible alchemist.

"Look, you can't just do that, okay? Do you know what a pain in the ass it is for me to deal with? This internship is bad enough without you making a mess of it. The police found the body you left in the park, you know. You cannot even imagine how many strings I had to pull to cover that up". (BP, 20)

The anger Sidney displays toward Rose, who leaves the body of a Strigoi on the street in the quote above, is a form of resistance to the rules he must obey to protect the existence of Moroi and Dhampirs in the human world. Mead not only depicts Sidney as a submissive body but also evokes resistance to the ruling group's rules, indicating the tension within the political body. Class rules function as a mechanism of control within the body politic, internalized emotionally and mentally by Moroi, Dhampirs, and humans. The self-discipline and instincts experienced by Moroi, Dhampirs, and humans demonstrate that their bodies are controlled by the political interests of those in power. Disobedience to class rules is perceived as failure, a threat, and a social deviance. This leads to social sanctions, stigma, and even punishment.

CONCLUSION

The body politics in Richelle Mead's *Vampire Academy* series represent a complex manifestation of power that operates directly on individual bodies through processes of control, discipline, and normalization. Power within the narrative does not operate solely through

formal laws or institutional authority; it is deeply embedded in social expectations and cultural norms that shape how bodies are perceived, controlled, and valued. These norms often prove more effective than legal structures, as they are internalized by individuals and enacted voluntarily through everyday behavior. As a result, the body becomes a central site where political power is exercised and maintained. The political system in *Vampire Academy* is depicted as a stable and enduring structure in which religious morality and rigid social class hierarchies operate in tandem. Moral frameworks influenced by Christian ethics promote ideals of sacrifice, purity, and obedience, which are emotionally reinforced by feelings of guilt and duty. At the same time, class divisions determine bodily roles and functions, particularly in the expectation that Dhampir bodies exist primarily as instruments of protection for the Moroi elite. Through this synergistic relationship, power is sustained not only through overt violence or coercion but through the subtle internalization of values that discipline both the mind and the body. Consequently, individuals across all social groups—Moroi, Dhampir, and Humans—actively help maintain the established social order by regulating their own bodies and desires. This study highlights how domination becomes normalized and largely unquestioned within the narrative. Future research could extend this analysis by exploring intersections of body politics with gender, race, and sexuality, as well as through comparative studies with other vampire or dystopian texts. Such approaches would deepen understanding of how fictional representations of bodily control shape broader cultural perceptions of authority, morality, and resistance.

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