

Venus in furs

The spiritual elements of SM



Eloise Severin

SM glossary

- **Scene:** a session in which a BDSM interaction is staged; a good scene has a start and finish, like a ritual
- **BDSM:** Bondage/Discipline; Domination/Submission; Sadism/Masochism or any combination of these
- **Top:** the one who is in control (not necessarily active)
- **Bottom:** the one being controlled (not necessarily passive)
- **SSC:** Safe, sane, consensual
- **RACK:** "Risk-Aware Consensual Kink": RACK is intended to embrace edgeplay and play that is engaged in without safewords.
- **Edgeplay:** Play that is seen as more unusually risky than the majority of BDSM play in the scene community.
- **Safeword:** an out-of-context word that stops the scene

SM:
some
psychological
considerations

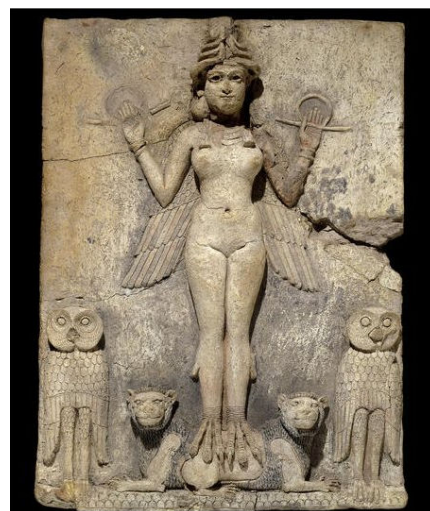


The Morrigan

Neuropsychology of SM

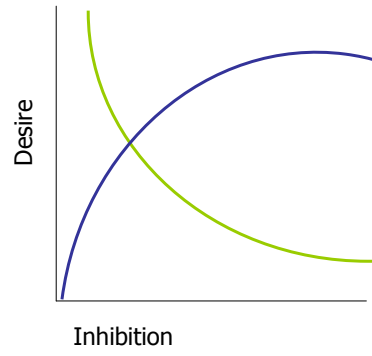
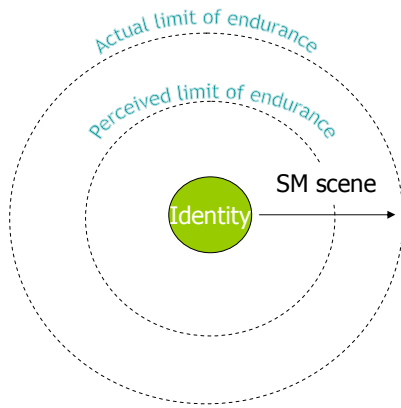
“The body secretes powerful chemicals, chiefly adrenaline and endorphins, when it is under stress, and these chemicals create euphoria and change the way the brain interprets stimuli which would ordinarily be perceived as painful.”

~ Pat Califia and
Cynthia Astuto



Lilitu / Inanna

Pushing back the boundaries



SM in history



Ereshkigal

SM in the ancient world

- Villa of the Mysteries, Pompeii
- Inanna's descent into the Underworld
- Hindu Kavandi ritual
- Lakota sun-dance (disputed)
- Body modification (scarification, tattoos)
- Some forms of monasticism
- Shamanic ordeals
- Cupping (possibly)



<http://www.bellaonline.com/articles/art37310.asp>

<http://baphomet.tearmainn.com/masterunderworld.html>

Sadism

- Donatien Alphonse François de Sade, Marquis de Sade (1740 - 1814); radical libertine, sadist, and moderate revolutionary
- Term “sadism” coined by Krafft-Ebing in *Psychopathia Sexualis*
- Various postmodern philosophers interested in his ideas



Masochism



- Leopold Ritter von Sacher-Masoch (1836 -1895), folklorist, author, journalist; socialist & humanist; favoured Jewish integration and women's emancipation
- Term "masochism" coined by Krafft-Ebing in *Psychopathia Sexualis*, based on Sacher-Masoch's novel, *Venus in Furs*, which Sacher-Masoch sought to live out with his mistress, Fanny Pistor

The Pearl

- *The Pearl, A Magazine of Facetiae and Voluptuous Reading* was issued for 18 months in 1879-1880 with two Christmas supplements.
- Included erotica of all kinds



[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Pearl_\(erotica\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Pearl_(erotica))

Michel Foucault

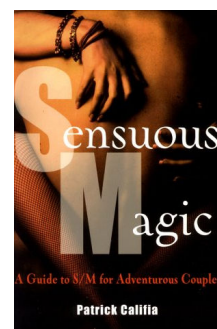
- Postmodernism / Nietzsche / nihilism
- Exploration of power relations - interest in S/M
- Subversion / reversal
- Absence of the self or psychological narrative of the self
- Panopticon society
- The shadow of the Enlightenment
- Death of certainty



<http://www.thefreelibrary.com/The+Passion+of+Michel+Foucault.-a013904338>

Patrick Califia

- Author of various SF novels and the *Lesbian SM safety manual*; also wrote *Speaking Sex to Power*
- Advocate of SM, pornography and individual freedom
- Excluded by lesbian community for views on SM
- Acknowledged the inequality of power in lesbian sadomasochistic practices, but contended that exploration and open discussion of these roles would not only lead to liberation but could also be extended to other issues of inequality within the feminist movement
- FTM transgender (1999)



http://www.glbtc.com/literature/califia_p.html

SM and spirituality



Lilith

Lupercalia

Plutarch described
Lupercalia thus:

“Lupercalia, of which many write that it was anciently celebrated by shepherds, and has also some connection with the Arcadian Lycaea.



At this time many of the noble youths and of the magistrates run up and down through the city naked, for sport and laughter striking those they meet with shaggy thongs. And many women of rank also purposely get in their way, and like children at school present their hands to be struck, believing that the pregnant will thus be helped in delivery, and the barren to pregnancy.”

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lupercalia>

Villa of the Mysteries, Pompeii

Scene 6. The initiate, carrying a staff and wearing a cap, returns from the night journey ... [the] initiate emerges like an infant at birth, from a dark place to a lighted place. She reaches for a covered object sitting in a winnowing basket, the *liknon*. The covered object is taken by many to be a phallus, or a herm.



To the right is a winged divinity, perhaps Aidos. Her raised hand is rejecting or warding off something. She is looking to the left and is prepared to strike with a whip.

<http://www.art-and-archaeology.com/timelines/rome/empire/vm/villaofthemysteries.html>

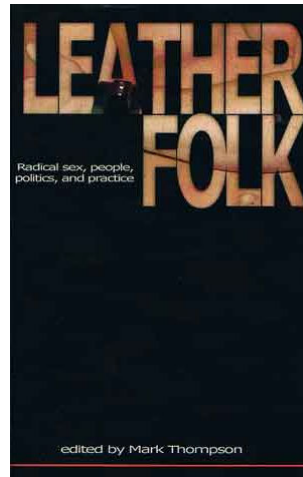
Villa of the Mysteries, Pompeii

Scene 7. The two themes of this scene are torture and transfiguration, the evocative climax of the rite. Notice the complete abandonment to agony on the face of the initiate and the lash across her back. She is consoled by a woman identified as a nurse. To the right a nude woman clashes celebratory cymbals and another woman is about to give to the initiate a thyrsus, symbolizing the successful completion of the rite.



Leatherfolk

Since its publication in 1991, *Leatherfolk: Radical Sex, People, Politics, and Practice* has become a classic, must-read book on human sexuality and identity. Widely acknowledged as being among the most useful books of its kind, the co-gender anthology is both historical witness and provocative treatise on this unique and often misunderstood subculture. The diverse contributors look at the history of the gay and lesbian underground, how radical sex practice relates to their spirituality, and what it means to them personally.



<http://www.markthompsongayspirit.com/>

Christian SM



Ecce homo,
Elisabeth Ohlson Wallin

"What does leather have to do with spirituality?"

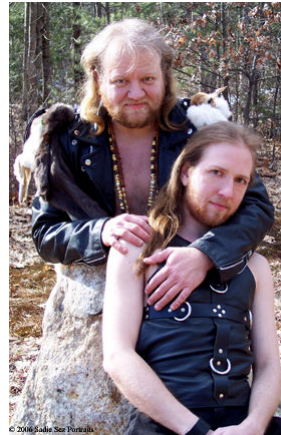
For most of the world, domination is a sign of anger and suppression, yet in the context of a leather scene it can be an act of caring and affection. As children we were taught that submission is a sign of weakness, yet in our realm submission becomes a voluntary surrender of power and an act worthy of respect. To some, bondage is a cruel affliction to be fought against. In our community, it can be an experience of soaring freedom and release. Acts of discipline can be punishment, a source of fear and trauma, but when it is part of a "scene" it can be a framework of protocol for our play. We take pain, ordinarily something to be avoided at all cost and embrace it, transforming it into pleasure.

<http://www.whosoever.org/v4i1/leather.html>

http://www.ohlson.se/utstallningar_ecce.htm

Pagan BDSM: Raven Kaldera

Throughout history, from the Hindu Kavadi ceremony to the Lakota Sun Dance, the Ordeal Path has been an honored spiritual road to the magic of the flesh, and to touching the Gods. Today many Pagans are discovering this path, by accident or by design. Simultaneously, many practitioners of secular BDSM are finding themselves having spiritual experiences in the middle of their most secular scenes.



<http://www.pagan bdsm.org>

Perfect love and perfect trust

The binding and scourging represent Perfect Trust (in that you have to trust someone to let them immobilise you and take a scourge to you), and the kiss represents Perfect Love. That is why the signs for the kiss and the scourge appear on the Pentacle in juxtaposition. However, the kiss has an important psychological function. The person who has been scourged has just had their outer self purified away; the kiss welcomes the inner self to the circle. Also, the prolonged experience of pain can make a different stimulus especially pleasurable, so the kiss acts as a contrast. Each is a different expression of love.



<http://pagantheologies.pbwiki.com/The-Scourge-and-the-Kiss>

To suffer is to learn

Ritual is close cousin to kink.
Here it is then: Rope, binding into
complicity like words do, bringing
you into this.

An opening is made through
crossed wrists raised to shoulder
blades.

This is the bridling of desire, into
inescapable honesty.

Turns sit snug against skin and
cinch into posture and poise.

Strands interweave and knots
secure the spell. Spine straight,
breast bound, and ends traversing
down and round. Thighs tied into
exquisite torture.

Rope is ritual, a controlling hold.
No space to hide. No room to turn
away. The only way is to submit
and release into the embrace of
loving rope. Perfectly trussed,
held tight, forever here outside of
time.

This is the pattern of initiation, blind, bind
and scourge.

The cat is cradled.

The candidate made and aided to stand, turn
and kneel.

Clear commands.

There is Love bound into this.

Love in every time the braid passes over and
against.

Love in the finishing cross of knots and figure
eight of ends.

Love in the slow stroke of scourge and swish
and sting.

Love in the symmetry of suggested lines that
web and bind.

Love for the beloved.

Love without mercy.

Kisses for the unwrapped wrists still marked.

Kisses for the opening wider eyes. Just more
kisses to cover her. A slow return, learning
how deep this truly goes.

<http://petergrey.livejournal.com/11487.html>

Changelings of the Dark Moon

We who are changelings of the Dark
Moon, whose wiring is built for this sort
of thing, we are not happy with the
fruit-and-flowers sex of the upper
world and its sunny gods. We are like
Inanna, who walked willingly into the
realm of Death, who was stripped of
her name and her power, who was
hung on a hook over the throne of the
Queen of Death, who had to be
ransomed back by those who turn
gender on its head and who are willing
to weep. She did it because there was
no other way to touch the deep
wisdom that she sought, no way but to
stumble along dark paths to the
katabasis point, and trust in all the
wisdom of the Underworld that you
may one day emerge triumphant.
- Raven Kaldera



The threefold Ordeal Path

1. **Using carefully applied pain in a specific ritual context** in order to bring the bottom into an altered state by using their own endorphins, and thus bring them closer to Spirit. Human beings have been doing this for eons. Traditional examples of this are the Lakota Sun Dance, the Hindu Kavandi ceremony and ball dances, the Catholic flagellatory orders, and so on.
2. **Using intense psychological theater in a ritual context to create a personally-tailored emotional ordeal** for the bottom, whereby they travel to the dark places in themselves and come out safely, and having learned useful things in the process. This is the archetypal Journey To The Underworld, and the top has to be both the psychopomp who gets them in and out, and the stand-in for the implacable Death Gods who inhabit that dark place.
3. **Using full-time serious D/s as a spiritual path.** This is rare even among perverts. My boy and I practice an extremely serious level of dominance-submission work (I don't call it play, because there is nothing playful about the way we do it) which means, in essence, that he has sworn his life to serve me.

- Raven Kaldera

Pain in a ritual context

1. Pain to achieve an altered state, via brain chemistry, in which one can connect with the universe, or do some kind of magical work such as directing energy for a spell. In this technique, which can of course also be done alone, the bottom is the primary magician and the goal of the scene is to get them "there", wherever "there" is, so that they can do "something". The top's magical job is to get them to that point.
2. Pain to create energy for the top to work with. When the body is in pain, it gives off a great deal of energy, which is accessible to many magic-workers. In this case, the top is the primary magician, and the bottom becomes one of their tools.
3. Pain to bring people back in touch with their bodies. This is an especially good technique for those who go into trance easily (and likely don't need pain to do it), but have trouble reconnecting with the physical.
4. Pain as a sacrifice, usually to a divine power who appreciates such things.
5. Pain as a strength ordeal, to build courage and self-worth by enduring agonizing things.
6. Pain as an emotional catharsis, in order to tap into deep negative feelings and expunge them. In this case, the pain is used as a trigger to unearth issues that need to be brought out into the light for healing.
7. Pain as a way to please a partner who is a sadist. ~ Raven Kaldera

Journey to the Underworld

- **Fear: the Gate of Fire**
Experiencing fear and going through it and out the other side
- **Shame: the Gate of Water**
A classic shame-ritual from ancient Sumeria is the myth of Inanna, the Queen of Heaven who goes down to the underworld in order to find wisdom. On her way through the gates of the underworld she is stripped of her crown (signifying temporal power), her jewels (signifying wealth), her rings (signifying magical power), her clothing (signifying protection) and finally her own name. As a nameless corpse, she is hung on the wall as a decoration for her sister Ereshkigal, the Queen of the Dead. When she is finally rescued, she has learned the wisdom of the depths.
- **Endurance: the Gate of Earth**
This is the Warrior's Gate, the place of suffering and striving to gain strength. This is the place where you learn to say, "I can take that and live." This is the place where you learn about the deep core of strength in yourself that cannot be broken.
- **Letting Go: the Gate of Air**
This is the leap off the cliff into Nothingness, to complete trust.
- **Rebirth**
Ritual theatre as a rite of passage

- Raven Kaldera

Kinky myths

- **Ogmios** was a Gaulish deity, whom Lucian records was depicted as a bald old man with a bow and club leading an apparently happy band of men with chains attached to their ears from his tongue. This is thought by some scholars to be a metaphor for eloquence, possibly related to bardic practices.
- Perseus and Andromeda – Andromeda chained to a rock for the sea serpent; Perseus rescues her.
- **Aengus** went to the lake of the Dragon's Mouth and found 150 girls chained up in pairs. He found his girl, Caer Iborneith. On November 1, Caer and the other girls would turn into swans for one year, every second Samhain. Aengus was told he could marry Caer if he could identify her as a swan. Aengus succeeded. He turned himself into a swan and they flew away, singing beautiful music that put all its listeners asleep for three days and nights.



Lee Lawrie, sculpted bronze figure of Ogmios (1939). Library of Congress John Adams Building, Washington, D.C.

Some practical considerations



Kali

Safe, sane, consensual



- Use safewords
 - **Green** - I need an adjustment
 - **Amber** - That's OK at the moment but it won't be in a minute
 - **Red** - stop completely
- Establish protocols
 - who can do what to whom, and how
 - Are you into B/D, D/s, S/M or some other combination?
- Script scenes / rituals beforehand
- Start low-key, establish boundaries, only push slightly beyond them
- Read a safety manual and/or how-to manual
- Be careful with hygiene around bodily fluids

How to be a Top

- “There is only one word which means both sacred and profane. That word is 'taboo'. The power of taboo is vital.”
- Use of empathy to know how far to go
- “I can worship a woman as a Goddess while treating her like a whore.”
- Focussing and controlling one’s impulses
- Understanding and enjoying psychological aspects of SM

~ Cat

Further reading

- <http://en.allexperts.com/q/BDSM-2733/spirituality-slavery.htm> (A Q&A piece, touches on Christian SM spirituality... much of which revolves unsurprisingly around DS)
- <http://www.houseofdesade.com/articles/spirituality2.htm>
- <http://www.mn-mistress.net/spiritualquest.htm>
- <http://www.esodom.com/spiritual/path.htm> - historic attitudes to masochism as a spiritual path.