

THE GAMES OF DOMINATION:
A Prolegomenon to a Psycho-Philosophical Analysis

by
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A WILL UNTO DEATH:

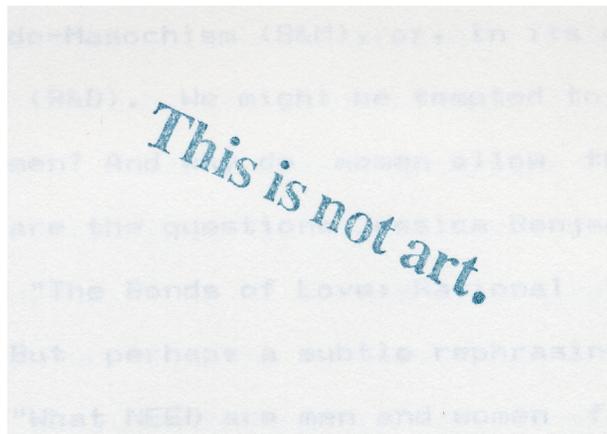
Nietzsche and Pynchon Together Again for the First Time

The Term Paper

Composed By

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There was a technician named Urban,
Who had an affair with a turbine.
"Its much nicer," he said,
"Than a woman in bed,
And its sure as hell cheaper than bourbon!"
Thomas Pynchon ¹

A few of the more astute members of this society may have noticed that there are some relationships which involve the physical and psychological domination of one of the people in the relationship by the other. Some may even have detected an alarming disproportionality between instances where the male dominates vs. instances where the female dominates. This phenomena has become a despised but accepted "perversion" within our society, called Sado-Masochism (S&M), or, in its milder form, Bondage and Discipline (B&D). We might be tempted to ask "Why do men try to dominate women? And why do women allow themselves to be dominated?" These are the questions Jessica Benjamin attempts to answer in her essay "The Bonds of Love: Rational Violence and Erotic Domination." But perhaps a subtle rephrasing would suit our purposes better: "What NEED are men and women fulfilling in their respective roles? And is this need present in those who do not actively engage in this sex-game?"

There is a certain responsibility in being a man. A man must be independent, his own man. This includes such things as being responsible for himself, and also for his family, making his own decisions (for better or for worse), being the principle source of income for the family (what respectable man could allow his wife to earn more than he does?), and the principle decision-maker of the family ("a man's home is his castle"). His responsibilities to his society include making a positive impact on the society in general, such as delegating the laws by which others will have to live. The traditional responsibilities of the woman, on the other hand, are less grand: to keep the house in order, to care for the children, and to provide for the pleasure of her husband.

That, despite all the apparent advances in the legal structures that regulate gender based roles, this tendency to follow these pre-established guidelines of gender role continues, Benjamin blames on the tendency of male infants to be separated and differentiated from their mothers

¹ All limericks are courtesy of Major Marvey's Marines, as found in Thomas Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow.

much sooner than female infants. The little boy is from the start treated differently, is separated, individuated. He is forced by his father to stop identifying with his mother and to assume his own -- male -- identity. The little girl, on the other hand, is encouraged not to separate from the mother, for she is the same as her mother. Hence she does not develop an independent identity for a much longer time, and will always have a need for dependence upon another person. Put succinctly: the male is defined as difference and hence independence, while the female is defined as sameness and hence dependence.²

Now, since the little boy has been brought up thinking of others as Other, he is easily able to objectify the other, viewing only himself as subject, the other as object to be dealt with in any way he sees fit. The little girl is brought up in such a way that she identifies herself with an Other for a longer time, and a complete break is usually never achieved. She, therefore, has a much more difficult time viewing the Other as an object to be used, but rather, sees the Other as a subject with feelings like hers. This is why, for Benjamin, men consistently dominate women, because they inadvertently think of them as object, and women allow themselves to be dominated because they don't want to cause the other to feel suffering or rejection.³

However, the fact that sexual domination occurs is not adequately explained by this. There is a need which desires to be fulfilled. To a certain extent, Benjamin realizes this. She describes this need as the need for recognition. The dominant person is recognized as important by the dominated. The dominated is ordered to recognize the importance of the dominator, which she does in order to be recognized as one who willingly obeys, which allots her some measure of importance, even if it is a lesser form.⁴ The entire process of domination, then, exists for the purpose of obtaining the pleasure of being recognized as important, valuable, necessary, omnipotent. As virile. Importance becomes concentrated on the phallus, which, since it is possessed by men alone, gives an importance to men. Here, the importance of penetration becomes obvious. Penetration is a penile function, a manly function; being penetrated, then, is an effeminate trait. Being able to penetrate becomes equivalent to being able to violate, and

² Jessica Benjamin, "The Bonds of Love: Rational Violence and Erotic Domination" in The Future of Difference. Hester Eisenstein and Alice Jardine, eds. (Boston: Barnard College Women's Center, G.K. Hall & Co, 1980). pp. 43-44.

³ Ibid. pp. 44-46.

⁴ Ibid. p. 52.

likewise, the ability to be penetrated is equivalent to a susceptibility to violation. They are opposite functions. Males are privileged because they are not susceptible, they are not weak; they are the strong, the violators. Foucault points out how, even in a society which endorsed homosexuality, an adult male was deemed unsuited for public office, for positions of leadership, if one was on the receptive side, if one continued being penetrated into adulthood.⁵ So it is not merely the phallus that is important, but the act of penetration, the potential to violate.

But since it is men who have been designated as important, recognition by women is not enough. Benjamin claims that "male domination is rooted in a struggle for recognition between men in which women are mere objects or tokens: the prize."⁶ This is, however, inaccurate. It would be better to say that it is the struggle for recognition by women (for that is who the power is directed against), which has as its prize: recognition by men! The goal, the prize, must pertain to that which is deemed important (those with phalluses, those who can penetrate), and thus women become, not a token or prize, but a tool, a means to this goal. They are valuable or important only insofar as they aid the man in attaining this goal.

Adorno describes this independent, commanding man:

Its archetype is the handsome dinner-jacketed figure returning late to his bachelor flat, switching on the indirect lighting and mixing himself a whiskey and soda: the carefully recorded hissing of the mineral water says what the arrogant mouth keeps to itself: that he despises anything that does not smell of smoke, leather, or shaving cream, particularly women, which is why they, precisely, find him irresistible.⁷

His name is Bond, James Bond. If I were Jacques Derrida, I would find it interesting that the name of the archetype coincides with what we are discussing, that is Bondage, and, perhaps, male bonding, as well. However, I am not Derrida, and so I will not mention it (in fact, I probably didn't even notice it!).

I would venture to say that this man is not striving for recognition, or, if he is, the struggle for recognition is not for the sake of recognition, but rather, he desires recognition because it gives him something else: power. For we can see already some of this power: the

⁵ Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, Vol. Two: The Use of Pleasure. Robert Hurley, transl. (New York: Vintage Books, 1984) pp. 219-225.

⁶ Benjamin. p. 55.

⁷ T.W. Adorno, Minima Moralia. From a handout. pp. 45-46.

power inherent in despising. By seeming not to care, by making himself not care, he puts himself out of the reach of any power that another may exert. The woman is powerless against him. She then, in an effort to gain some influence, tries (in vain) to make him love her. She has shown that she cares, and the trap shuts: She cares, he does not; he can do anything he wishes to her, and she does anything he wishes her to.

So what we see is a clash between two wills, two forces, in which one dominates and one is dominated. Nietzsche understands this as "will to power". What (or who) is will to power? Will to power is always the will for more power: the will to grow, to appropriate, to dominate. It is quanta of force: stronger forces seek to dominate weaker forces. Here it becomes obvious that will to power is never singular, but always plural, multiple, for a force can only act upon or react with another force, and nothing else. Hence will to power is a plurality of forces which are in a continual struggle to dominate other forces, in a continual struggle for ever greater amounts of power. These forces are each different from each other, they are fundamentally unequal. In this way we can see that will to power is not some unifying principle, not "the same thing." Rather, each is different from the others, and even, over time, different from itself, for it is always dominating or being dominated, becoming more or less powerful. To dominate, however, one must be resisted. It is only against resistance that will to power can assert itself, for it must act on another will, on another force, and the nature of force is to resist.⁸

Will to power exists in every sphere of existence. It is evident not only in political and personal interactions, but also on a biological/psychological level, and even on a chemical and physical level. The individual, then, is not a unified thing, but is an affect of will to power. That is, it is a disunity, a multiplicity of forces which are in a constant struggle for domination. The predominant forces dictate the behavior of the rest of the forces, and becomes with the "self", which is an illusory product of this domination. This has some interesting repercussions on what we call the subject, and how it becomes what is. More on that later.

Furthermore, will to power is not just force, but also the quality of force. It is a judgment, an affirmation or a negation. It is what values, what creates values, what values the

⁸ For my understanding of "will to power", I am indebted not only to the actual texts of Nietzsche's, but also to Alphonso Lingus's "The Will to Power" and Gilles Deleuze's Nietzsche & Philosophy, and, to a lesser extent, Michel Foucault's Discipline & Punish and Alexander Nehamas' Nietzsche: Life as Literature. However, I would get hopelessly lost trying to discern what came from where, and one footnote is enough, or even too much, don't you think?

values it has created. According to Nietzsche, an affirmation becomes an affirmation of life, a negation becomes the will to deny life. But it is a will nonetheless, and the values created will reflect this judgment: this is what determines the nature of the values which are valued.

If we are going to accept the concept of will to power, we are going to have to reinterpret everything that we have discussed thus far. First of all, the question of the man's need is answered to some extent: the need is the need to dominate, the will to take power over another's life. But what need does this system of domination attempt to fulfill in women? This we can not yet answer.

Let us look at the woman who recognizes the desires of the man (she wills his will) in order to be recognized. And at the man who recognizes the woman only insofar as she is willing to submit to his desires, to will his will. His power lies in the ability to deny her value. He is able to walk away and leave her alone. She too can walk away, but he does not care: her value is as something which submits, and when she does not submit she has lost her value. His value, on the other hand, lies in his ability to walk away, to abandon her, to exist without her. By being able to do this, he can prove his worth at any time. To prevent this, the woman must continue to submit herself to his will, and thus she affirms his value, which is his ability to deny.

The ability to walk out of a relationship is very powerful.

The source of this may be, as Benjamin claims, the act of differentiation of the male infant from the mother, the ability to see the other as object, rather than subject. But this is not the cause, but rather the means, the strategy by which men are capable of dominating women. Similarly, it is not that men try to assert power over women in order to gain recognition, but rather that they strive to gain recognition in order to secure a position of power for themselves.

This sexual game of domination does not, as we have seen, impose a will upon a wholly willing object. The object of domination must resist, what Nietzsche calls "this game of resistance and victory."⁹ In Benjamin's treatment of The Story of O, the sadists find more pleasure in their command, rather than in O's submissiveness. The idea is to consume the will of the other, but "they must be careful never to wholly consume her as will-less object, but rather to

⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, The Will to Power. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale, transl., Walter Kaufmann, ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1967) # 699.

command and consume her will.¹⁰ The goal is not to totally enslave her, to strip her of her will, but rather to slowly and continuously violate her, to see how far they can push her. It is a game of pushing her will to the limit of its resistance (never completely destroying this resistance, however), and violating it. This leads inevitably to the destruction of the dominated (we shall see this exemplified in Gravity's Rainbow later), or of the will of the dominated. But here the dominated no longer resists, and thus can no longer be overcome, defeated, subjugated. And, this conquest won, the sadists turn to other sources of pleasure.

¹⁰ Benjamin. p. 54.

There was a young man from Decatur,
Who slept with a LOX generator.
His balls and his prick
Froze solid real quick,
And his asshole a little bit later.

Women do not allow themselves to be placed in positions of submission for wholly altruistic reasons, such as for the sake of "love," as even Nietzsche hints at times. Getting involved in a relationship of this sort is the result of some need, which they attempt, though with dubious success, to fulfill. In a male dominated world, in which the rules of discourse, the rules of the games which are played are created and controlled by men, a woman is forced to play in the pre-established games. She can, occasionally, break from her traditional role, and play the other role, in this case, the role of the male, the penetrator, violator, dominator. However, the rules remain the same, the roles the same, but with different players. To try to create new roles is to throw oneself outside of society, outside of the game, to cease to play at all. In a society where one's value comes from how well one plays this game, not playing is to lose, to be stripped of value. And, while this role reversal does occur, the rules of the game are predisposed to favor the abilities of the males: the woman who can win this is the woman who can defeat her own femininity, who can become a man, who can violate.¹¹

However, most women are not men, and thus can not win the game as a man, in the male role. They have lost even as they begin playing, for they are playing the game of men, and in playing, they are validating a game which privileges men. Through this game, men produce women as women through the use of subjugation, by exerting power (which, it must be stressed, is productive -- it produces effects -- not repressive), for the purposes of men. These purposes? More power, of course. But why is it important for men to produce women as such? Because by doing so, they produce/re-produce themselves as creatures with the power to produce women, to dominate women, to control women. And this ability to control does not extend only to women: they are merely playthings in this game, mere training! The power to dominate, to control is then used against other men, in the sphere that is deemed important. The game of domination of men over women exists only in order that men can better dominate other men. And here we see that the man who can successfully play the game of domination with his women

¹¹ This interpretation was probably influenced by Jacques Derrida's Spurs, but having not read it for a number of years, I can not give specific references.

is given a competitive edge in his power plays with other men. He has learned to command. That is, he has learned how much he can expect, and gets it. The man who can dominate women can dominate the man who allows himself to be dominated by a woman.

In Gravity's Rainbow, Pynchon describes such a relationship. In this case it is a threesome, with Captain Blicero ("Blicero" being a god of death in some African religion, which also stands for his own submerged death-wish) as the dominant member of the relationship, and dominated are Katje and Gottfried. They do what they are told. Blicero violates both of them, male and female, in every way he can imagine. Sometimes he has Gottfried take Katje (pleasure in the act must not be shown! Only pleasure in following orders.). Sometimes Katje is ordered to violate Gottfried (necessitating a transformation of Katje into a male, courtesy of an artificial strap-on penis). Here the dominated dominate each other, but it is not their domination, but rather Blicero's domination is increased by dividing them from each other, by destroying their solidarity. Their dominating is his dominating. Or, in more phallogocentric terms: his penis is lengthened. The penis of the second-order dominator is added to the prime dominator's penis. And since the penis is the paradigm of control, of power, his power is increased proportionally.

This can be seen in other sphere's of life as well. In Nazi Germany, it was not just the Germans who dominated and subjugated the Jews: they assigned Jews to watch, to control, to subjugate other Jews. They divided what they had conquered, forcing some to subjugate the others. In this way they increased their power not only by dominating the enemy, but by appropriating the enemy's power for their own uses, effectively multiplying their power and symbolically growing larger penises.

Where did the importance of the penis come from? From God. This is why God is always referred to in the masculine: because He has a Perfect and Infinite Penis. We are ordered to get on our knees and worship this God with His infinite penis. And we must not stray from this penis worship (prayers become a form of fellatio), for He is a jealous God. We may, however, show some recognition to the King's penis, for his was a divine inheritance of a bit of God's penis. And, to a lesser extent, recognition of the ordinary male's penis was acceptable (for it was the way in which man participated in the divinity of God), as long as it was approved by God first, in the ceremony of the wedding. However, with the death of God, new, albeit less infinite and perfect, penises needed to be developed. We needed a new symbolism to justify the dominant place of the male in our society.

The spirit of male domination finds a perfect symbol in Nazi Germany: a highly militant and dominant society, perfectly capable of rationally creating the most hideous atrocities. And we find in Germany the obsoletization of all the traditional phallic symbols, such as the train (which is long and goes in and out of tunnels), the gun (which is long and hard and shoots -- and violates other people bodies!) : the creation of the ultimate phallus, the rocket. The rocket is long and hard, ends explosively, but (an improvement) also goes up and down, on its own, and can violate not only other bodies, but other cities and countries.

The countries which currently have the biggest penises are the United States and the Soviet Union. But I am straying into Pynchon's symbolism and metaphor.

In a society where the penis is the primary object of value, where it is the key to places which women can not enter (Leonard Swidler, in his article "No Penis, No Priest", reports that, in a public dialogue, an Episcopalian priest who opposes the ordination of women conceded that the lack of a penis in women is the sole reason a woman cannot be a priest). Women, due to their lack of penis, are separated from the forms of power and domination which are open to men: penetration, entering, violating. The male form of power has become a spewing forth of power, an expulsive force, which goes out of the body, reaching out, expanding, subjugating. This is why women can never play the male role in sexual dominance as well as a male: even with the use of an artificial phallus, her orgasms are wrong; the ultimate display of power, forcing the other to accept and internalize the seminal fluids.

The woman, then, is forced to seek alternate ways of dominating, that is, by accepting, appropriating, internalizing. By bringing the other into herself, making him a part of her. By making him need her, even if only to dominate. By realizing the man's need to dominate, she can cater to that need, associating that need with herself, thus becoming needed. The man then becomes dependant upon the woman, and she the dominant member of the relationship. Women, who were previously produced as women by men for the purposes of men, now have found a way to produce/re-produce themselves as women for the purposes of men, and for the more subversive purposes of women.

"This [latent] violence seems a threat directed against others, of whom such a one, sprawling in his easy chair, has long since ceased to need."¹² As we have seen, the dominator

¹² Adorno. p. 46.

must be both capable of violence and beyond any need for an attachment to another. The key word of this text is "seems." This view of himself as an uncaring sadist is a carefully cultivated lie, a lie which is necessary to remain the dominator, to have and gain power, to keep from being dominated himself. The sadist is, at root, a masochist, but this must never even be suspected.¹³ I am reminded again of Blicero's forever hidden death-wish.

So, let us visit our loving threesome again. One day Katje disappears, never to be seen by Blicero or Gottfried again. She has walked away. This practically destroys Blicero, who was depending on her for his passion play, his Hansel & Gretel fantasy. He needed her as something to dominate, someone to help him dominate. His penis was shortened by her departure. His ability to dominate effectively was reduced. Katje has denied his value: she is no longer resisting, has not been conquered, but rather has removed herself from his influence, and has left him with a feeling of loss, and an intensification of his death-wish. His need to dominate has left him open to domination, to his own pain. This affair has backfired.

¹³ Ibid.

There once was a fellow named Ritter,
Who slept with a guidance transmitter.
It shrivelled his cock,
Which fell off in his sock,
And made him exceedingly bitter.

We can see that each instance of sexual domination contains an element, or at least the potential for dependency upon the dominated. And this is exactly the opposite of what is desired, what is necessary for "manhood." The only time dependency is not implied in the very act of domination is when the dominator does not dominate out of a need to dominate, or out of a need for the other person, but is rather just an action, and a capricious one at that.

The fact that one is always open to domination is a terrifying concept for men. Another Pynchonian example is Tyrone Slothrop's recurring nightmares of being raped in a public restroom by large black men. But one need not even know when it is happening (referred to in the vulgar as being "pussy-whipped"), and this multiplies this fear. The reaction to this potential is, first of all, an ever increasing *resentment* (yes, this is meant in a Nietzschean way) towards the potential form of dominance, the potential resistance; secondly, it is an ever increasing need to dominate, not in the sense that Nietzsche would praise, that is, for the sake of dominating, but out of fear that anybody who is left undominated has the potential to dominate oneself. Rather, this is a reaction to a fear, a *saying no* to the other forces around oneself, for one is not comfortable with oneself. It is the translation of saying no to oneself into saying no to the rest of the world. It is the death-wish externalized. So it is no wonder that, after Katje's abdication, Blicero intensifies his subjugation and domination of Gottfried to an astounding degree. It becomes Hansel & Gretel with a twist. But how far do we let this phenomenon progress? Where, or how, do we stop it? [At this point the author shrugs his shoulders: it stops itself.]

So it becomes obvious that men have become obsessed with this: that they might lose their independence. Fear of dominance and vengeance upon those who might succeed in this is the motivating cause of the need to dominate. The greater the fear, the more intense the domination. The more intensely everyone is trying to dominate, the greater the fear. LO! A circle, and a vicious one at that.

This desire to dominate has become a very negative form of will to power. It has ceased coming from an overwhelming desire to expand, to grow, out of an overabundance, an overflowing of force. Now it derives its source from the weakness of the dominator, from his insecurities, from his failing, both actual and potential. It is no longer a grasping outward of a necessity born of overabundant strength, but rather a flailing outward of a weak, insecure, and fearful man.

This can be seen on a political level in the United State's Central American policy: if we do not control them, if we do not dominate their political sphere, they are our enemy, and must be dominated.

This tendency towards phallogentric domination exists in more than just a few spheres: it is everywhere. The world is a multiple complex of forces. These exist in everything that we have traditionally considered power. However, it is also, and more insidiously so, in the smaller spheres of life: in the family, the church, the library, the group of friends you hung out with in high school, and in your second grade teacher. Power manifests itself in all great events, but more importantly, in everything that is small, base, and common.¹⁴ However, the predominant tendency now is to dominate feverishly in an attempt to avoid being dominated oneself.

That the world is such a chaotic mess of struggling forces is unacceptable to this man, for it is uncognizable. By postulating, however, that we can understand what is going on, that is, to reduce the damn near infinite multiplicity of the world to a series of laws (of logic, of science, of "common" sense) is to ignore the vast majority of events in order to make sense of the world. And this sense must be made, it does not exist on its own. All this, then, comes from a desire to dominate the entire world: by making it comprehensible, and then, by creating its laws.¹⁵ For there are too many loose ends in a chaotic world, too many potential sources of domination.

¹⁴ This is an odd combination of the concepts and phrasings of Nietzsche and Foucault.

¹⁵ Nietzsche, Will to Power. # 495, 509.

There once was a thing called a V-2,
To pilot which you did not need to --
You just pushed a button
And it would leave nuttin'
But stiffs and big holes and debris, too.

We can now see that there is an ever-greater need to dominate, in sexual, marital, political, and societal spheres. This need arises from a fear of being dominated, from a vengeance upon those who might try to dominate. But, as we have seen, none is perfectly and utterly dominated. Even the dominated can exert their own influence.

Hence the need for violence, the threat of "If you don't do what I tell you, I will kill you." One no longer tries to gain victories over resisting wills; that is too dangerous! We no longer trust ourselves enough to take a risk. One tries to eliminate resistance before it can resist.

Rationality is exactly this sort of violence. It is the imposition of a man-made (human, all-too-human) series of values and laws onto the world, and then a forgetting that these laws are created, are not absolute. We try to impose absolutes on a world of becoming, on a world of chaos. But we do not even know what it would mean to live in a world of absolutes.

Rationality, specifically: male rationality, as it is the male who, throughout history, has been defined as the rational half of our species, can be seen as a sort of intellectual, transcendent, or metaphysical penis (although we know that it is really a lie...). It is a weapon by which we can disarm our opponents. All we have to say is "You're being irrational again." The danger comes not from others who can rationally debate one's own point, for here no matter who wins the battle, rationality is affirmed implicitly in the unquestioning acceptance of that form of discourse, but rather from those who do not participate in the accepted game. This destroys the other's ability to effectively argue. It devalues their views, while creating value for one's own "truth", by comparing it with rationality, which is valued in itself. For "value is the highest quantum of power that a man is able to incorporate."¹⁶ Thus the greatest weapon we wield is the ability to value something, or withhold value from it.

Here we see, then, an ever increasing desire, or need to control, to rationalize, to totalize the object into a scheme which we can understand, manipulate, control for our own uses, for our own pleasures, and for our own protection. The need to dominate the world can be seen in forms of the will to power such as Capitalism, the Church, Marxism, in the Periodic Table of

¹⁶ Ibid. # 713.

the Elements, in the works of B.F. Skinner, and in Hegel. Referring more and more often to rationality to justify these urges of domination, we find a tendency to refer to more and more universally accepted absolutes: absolutes which have a greater value in the struggle to dominate. By strapping ourselves into the giant phallus of rationality, the new game of domination, we find ourselves in a position to dominate ever more powerfully, ever more completely, with ever greater effects, and ever greater destruction.

In The Story of O, O was eventually totally subjugated. She was stripped of her individuality, her value was posited only insofar as she could please the other, and nothing else. Her resistance was destroyed. And the game was over. She lost. She lost her will, her ability to resist. And she was abandoned. And she killed herself, for now she was utterly valueless.

Domination leads, inevitably, to the destruction of the dominated, the destruction of the subject. The will is destroyed, utterly. It can even see where it is going to, but does not know how to escape. It has forgotten how to resist, how to choose.

We have seen the Penis of God (which spewed forth life) replaced by the rocket: the Penis of Death.

The game, the war, is now on automatic: it cannot be stopped.

[can it, perhaps, be altered?]

As Blicero leads us to, through, into, but never out of his death-wish, his oven.

We are Hansel, and Gretel has departed. He pauses, momentarily: it is our choice, but we have forgotten how to choose, and soon the doors swing shut, the world trembles around us, and we feel ourselves rising...

"Send it up. Watch it rise. See it fall."

A screaming comes across the sky.

It has happened before, but there is nothing
to compare it to now.

Now, everybody –

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