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The Fires of Frustration: A Brutal Ridiculing of Authoritarianism

Whether through force or persuasion, it is an inherent human desire to control. It drives people to govern the various aspects of their lives, be their emotions, their environment, or even one another. This last one in particular is especially important from a social perspective, as it affects smaller-scale relationships such as those between friends, but also larger-scale relationships like one between a government and its people. More specifically, if a government operates without a set of checks and balances, it will become an overpowering force, and the amount of control it will have over its people becomes unquantifiable. Deathspell Omega is a band whose lyrical content focuses on exactly this: the events that will happen if a government is given too much control. In particular, their song, “The Fires of Frustration,” describes a reality where a totalitarian government attempts to gain complete dominance over its people. Deathspell Omega’s song describes two parties: the Men of Resentment and the Order. The Men of Resentment are those in the population who feel alienated, frustrated, and marginalized because of their powerlessness to do anything about their low place in the social hierarchy. The Order, on the other hand, authors the song and proposes a government that will unite all these people and relieve them of their struggles. However, the true goal of this group is to gain full control over these Men of Resentment, subjugate them, and turn them into mindless versions of themselves that will do only as they are told. Throughout Deathspell Omega’s song, “The Fires of Frustration,” the Order plays with the emotions of the Men of Resentment by using overly

expressive word choices to create false empathy; by sugarcoating their hopeless destinies under the Order; and by forcing them into action after an initial trust has been established, effectively satirizing the horrors and absurdity of a totalitarian government.

The initial few lines of the song successfully criticize the emotional manipulation authoritarian regimes use to organize and sway their people. One of the first lines states, “ [The] Men of Resentment; whose stomachs and souls are aflame with the poisonous hatred of impotence” (DsO 1). The Order utilizes words such as “poisonous” and “impotence” to describe the Men of Resentment’s struggle and push the fact that they understand the tension they face against the more successful. However, this is just a ploy so that the Order can gain the trust of these people. In reality, the Order is exploiting the frustrations of the Men of Resentment to their advantage, applying emotive language to whatever they can to fabricate a false empathy with them. When examined closer, “poisonous” and “impotence” are word choices that heavily caricature the feelings of these people, to the extent that they in fact demoralize their characters. The line aims to persuade the Men of Resentment to join the Order’s cause, but it simultaneously ridicules them. It is akin to a curse under one’s breath, and it mocks the idea of authoritarian persuasion as a whole. Along the same lines, the Order cleverly sets up a common enemy -- the successful -- that they can leverage to unite their people: “You whom have been wronged ... [by] those sitting unjustifiably above you” (DsO 1). Creating a shared enemy is a classic propaganda technique used to unify an authoritative regime’s people around one common goal. Not only does this bring these people together, but it also gives them an incentive to trust the Order since they were able to pinpoint the main reason for their struggles. On a broader level, the two lines mock the emotional manipulation authoritarian forces leverage in order to organize and gain the trust of its citizens. The song effectively illustrates an authoritarian government that grabs the

frustrations and angers of its people and redirects them towards something that all in the group can relate to, mocking the similar acts of many previous dictatorial regimes in the real world.

Afterward, the song starts to introduce some of the goals the government will target, but cleverly sugarcoats their real meanings, satirizing how authoritarian governments disguise their control over their citizens as beneficial for them. The initial appeal to pathos from the previous lines sets up for the proposal that comes in the next: “We will grant you freedom from freedom” (DsO 2). On the immediate surface level, the line is an obvious contradiction of itself but seems to provide a promising proposal to the Men of Resentment. However, the line goes deeper than this. Normally, a proposal is expected to provide some sort of mutual benefit, but in this case, accepting the proposal would only lead to a loss of control for the Men of Resentment. The second use of the word “freedom” here refers to the obligations that come with it, specifically the ones that the Men of Resentment deal with under those with a higher social rank. Gaining freedom from these responsibilities seems like a potentially beneficial promise, but the hidden drawback to this is a loss of individuality and the ability to drive their own decisions. Later lines, such as, “We will dissolve your individuality in the multitude” (DsO 10) also support this. Instead of the freedom where one can act, think, or speak in the way they want to, freedom is twisted into something that those with power can manipulate. The line brutally satirizes the sugarcoated promises that dictatorial governments declare as “benefits” for their people, but in reality, these promises have hidden meanings that result in a gain of control for the government, but a loss of it for their people.

As the song continues building, the Order drops all pretenses of empathy and forces its people to work towards its goals, mocking how authoritarian governments end up prioritizing their primary objectives over any other concerns. In the second half of the passage, the Order

declares: “We will give you just enough of a taste of paradise to feed your dissatisfaction and turn you into feral dogs” (DsO 9). In contrast to all the previous lines, this one does not sugarcoat any meaning. While the first half of the song uses subtle manipulation tactics to gain the Men of Resentments’ trust, the Order now speaks nothing but the pure and brutal truth of their intent. The harsh honesty of this line mocks how easily vulnerable groups can be taken advantage of by a controlling government after an initial trust is established between the two. “Paradise” and “insatisfaction,” two completely opposing ideas, are juxtaposed, pushing the idea that whatever promised land the Men of Resentment hoped to attain will always be out of reach. The use of the term “feral dogs” dehumanizes them to a form that can only be categorized as unwaveringly obedient to the Order, driven by nothing but their instincts to chase a utopian future that they can only hope to find. The line criticizes the exploitation of a controlling government’s citizens through heavy exaggeration and violent descriptions, mocking the very foundation that authoritarian governments consider even reasonable. Overall, the second half of the song does an excellent job of getting to the point, criticizing how authoritarian regimes eventually drop their sympathetic disguises and focus on nothing but the goals that they have in front of them.

Deathspell Omega effectively satirizes the atrocities and obscenities that result of an authoritarian government through their depiction of a regime that emotionally manipulates its people and sugarcoats its real intentions. Other than mocking these regimes' strategies to control their people, perhaps the song is a warning against something that could result from society’s actions, where its people’s desire to control overwhelms any other sense of morality.

Works Cited

Deathspell Omega. "The Fires of Frustration." *The Furnaces of Palingenesia*, NoEvDia, 2019.

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