

We Must Remove The Letter A describes an imagined future where, after a protest that is heavily implied to have been started by an underground anarchist movement spreads significantly, the government chooses to limit the effect that the group has by outright banning the letter “A”, allowing them to arrest all those who practise anarchy, and outlaw the anarchist symbol, which is itself the letter “A” within a circle. Throughout the poem, those who previously identified as anarchists repeatedly tries to find workarounds to these language restrictions, for instance, by renaming their group to “ecoterrorists,” then later “communists,” however, each time they successfully find a workaround, the government bans another letter, thus further restricting the group.

To demonstrate the effect that the removal of these letters has on communication, each time a letter is banned by the government, it is also removed from the poem itself. This is a concept known as a “lipogram.” Throughout the poem, as letters are banned, fewer words can be used to describe specific events, and as such, words used to describe these events progressively become more and more vague, to the point that rhymes are unable to form in the poem, and certain passages are intentionally challenging to comprehend. This helps the audience not only understand what the government is doing in the poem, but see first hand its effects on the expression of ideas and thoughts. For instance, after the removal of various letters in the poem, the word “bureaucrat” becomes “ministers of government,” which then becomes “guys in suits,” each one not quite meaning the same as the previous word, and each one being much more vague than the last. Another example is the word “Anarchist,” which becomes “Bolchevique unrest,” then becomes “ecoterrorist,” then “not good people,” and finally “Communist.” This is despite anarchy and communism being fundamentally different from each other, which helps to communicate the fact that when certain words or language elements are taken away from us, we are severely limited in what we have the ability to communicate.

By the end of the poem, the author is unable to rebel, as almost every letter, and as such every option to rebel has been taken away from them, with the only option available to them is the ability to say “I’m free,” representing that if the government, or some greater power is able to control language, they are able to control the people living in the society, restrict their ability to fight and express what they believe, and voice their opinions. Ironically, this moment of supposed freedom comes after the citizens of this fictitious society have been subjected to the highest degree of censorship, and suppression.