

Dear Poets,

Today's teaching takeaway examines Jessica Guzman's "Ode at the Hospital" from *Adelante* (Switchback Books, 2020), anaphora our vantage point.

Ode at the Hospital

My father's moustache aced geometry.
My father's moustache makes cowboys blush
with its hard line. My father's moustache
has two spots, one light in one dark,
like a black-eyed pea, or a tube t.v.
shutting off. My father's moustache talks
like Ricky Ricardo, tells fortunes, chants
"Our Fathers" in its sleep—it dreams blue seas.
My father's moustache survived chemotherapy.
My father's moustache goes by Antonio
if you're family. If not, try a cup of water
under your bed—it cures everything.

A closer look at the poem's sonic qualities:

My father's moustache aced geometry.
My father's moustache makes cowboys blush
with its hard line. My father's moustache
has two spots, one light in one dark,
like a black-eyed pea, or a tube t.v.
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under your bed—it cures everything.

How It's Put Together

Line 1 My father's moustache aced geometry.

Introduction of anaphora, "My father's moustache." The first detail we learn: facial hair's potential for math excellence.

Lines 2-3 My father's moustache makes cowboys blush / with its hard line.

Anaphora two, enjambment. The second detail: this moustache puts cattlemen's humor to shame.

Lines 3-6 My father's moustache
has two spots, one light in one dark,
like a black-eyed pea, or a tube t.v.
shutting off.

Anaphora three, image aided by simile which consists of an organic item—featuring color—preceded by the tech-inorganic. Note the rhyme of *pea* and *t.v.*, enjambment contributing to this rhyme's sparkle.

Guzman shared her thoughts on image during an interview for the University of Arizona Poetry Center's *1508* blog:

"I do love making images, which, for me, often means rendering what I think of as the landscape of the poem. Unlike more general terms, landscape by definition suggests boundaries—a photograph's margins, the perimeter of a viewer's peripherals, the view from a single point, and so on. Like received form or the blank page, landscape confines; however, also like received form or the blank page, its confinement can lead to freedom in other ways. Sometimes the image-making process functions as a distraction, allowing other parts of my mind to make observations they may not have otherwise Sometimes [imagery] becomes an act of understanding the boundaries in which I'm writing, giving me questions to ask myself: what is excluded from this landscape? From what angle have I been making images?"¹

Lines 6-8 My father's moustache talks
like Ricky Ricardo, tells fortunes, chants
"Our Fathers" in its sleep—it dreams blue seas.

Anaphora four, the moustache speaks. Line five's simile invokes the voice of a famous '50s character. The moustache offers prophecy and recites a Catholic prayer once asleep. Guzman enjambes ("talks," "chants") on two words associated

with verbal communication before segueing into pelagic dreams.

Line 9 My father's moustache survived chemotherapy.

Anaphora five, its most molten aspect, the ode's tone shifted to literal life-and-death circumstances. *Chemotherapy*, the poem's longest word, shares the *-eam* heard in the optimistic *dreams*.

Lines 10-12 My father's moustache goes by Antonio
if you're family. If not, try a cup of water
under your bed—it cures everything.

Anaphora six, family may call the moustache by its name, though non-family members are privy to remedy. The connotative electricity of *cures* sustains Guzman's earlier tonal shift (*survived chemotherapy*).

Prompt

Write a short ode (12-13 lines) fueled by anaphora. Focus on a relative's physical characteristic or personality trait. Emulate Guzman with a radical tonal shift towards the end. Try at least one simile built from contrasts between the organic and tech-inorganic (smartphone, portable radio, hologram generator, et cetera).

Drawing additional inspiration from this month's poet, consider the ways your “[imagery] becomes an act of understanding the boundaries in which [you're] writing.”

Happy Poeming,

Jon

¹ <https://poetry.arizona.edu/blog/interview-jessica-guzman>