

Aporetic description. Inverse descriptions patterns in “The Sleeping Beauty’s airplane”, by Gabriel García Márquez

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Abstract

This paper is about a short story by Gabriel García Márquez. It is known in English as “The sleeping beauty and the airplane”.

The method of analysis is textual interpretative, which renders possible a personal explicative hypothesis. First we explain what classic philosophy has defined as *aporia*. Then we find how that definition can be applied to literature. Besides, using the concepts and the theories that narratology has set, we analyze the characters. The objective is interpreting how the absence of information can be used as a description, both within the literature and in the situations of social interaction. In this story, a woman simply called “the Beauty” is never defined by what she is, but rather by what she is not. We deduce how she is like after many contrasts between her and the other characters. After reading the text, we discover that the narrative theory must deepen into other character description procedures. So far, narrative studies have focused in “positive” description, that is, descriptions based on the characters’ traits, not in the lack of them.

The conclusions are: (i) While the story is a lineal narration and does not offer any narrative originality, it develops inverse description patterns in order to define a major character in a short story. We will dare to call such descriptive device the aporetic definition of the character. And (ii) Being the basic tool of literature, language is used as a device to describe the world and social relations, which may be based on non-written rules and classifications. Semiotics has proved that even the lack of signs is a sign itself, a way to define people, producing what Derrida (1989) calls ontical metaphors, whose persistence produce meaning. As we see, even when we lack of evidence to judge others, we end up doing it.

Keywords: narratology, aporia, character description.

Introduction

“The Sleeping Beauty’s airplane” is a short story written by Colombian author, Nobel-prize winner Gabriel García Márquez; it is included in the book “Doce cuentos peregrinos”. This book has normally been translated to English as “Strange pilgrims”. Nonetheless, such translation is not accurate at all. The appropriate translation is “Twelve pilgrim tales”. The story’s name has also been misquoted. Its precise translation is “The Sleeping Beauty’s airplane”.

The plot is this. In the Paris airport, called Charles De Gaulle, an anonymous man, –who is also the narrator- is hypnotized by the beauty of an unknown woman. Both of them must travel to New York and, by chance, they end up doing it in the same plane, sitting next to each other. Although the man is shocked by the beauty of the woman, he does not dare to talk to her. They finally arrive to New York

and the woman disappears forever. The title of the story evidently alludes the fairy tale known as “The sleeping beauty of the forest”.

García Márquez’s text, published in 1982, seems to have been poorly studied by some scholars, who have considered it as piece of scarce relevance. For instance, Bell-Villada thinks this short story does not have a big importance, and it is mere stuff in the book:

“The story captures some of the banalities familiar to all air travelers... Other than this, not much happens here... Ultimately, “Avión” is a slight story that overly reflects upon its origins as a journalistic (puff?) piece. It is the only piece in *Doce cuentos peregrinos* in which the narrator assumes a prominent, almost leading role and can be too easily identified with the author himself. Perhaps García Márquez chose to include it among his “pilgrims” in order to have a suggestive total of an even dozen rather than the uncomfortable prime number eleven” (Bell-Villada, 2010, 154).

This disdainful attitude may come from major misunderstandings. We hope that the analysis we will make may show that the text does have a meaning density, one that is bigger than what we can see at first glance. Being the basic tool of literature, language is used as a device to describe the world and the relations that occur between human beings. Now we must not only focus in the way the individuals influence the world, but also the other way around: all through his futile quest for the Beauty, the Narrator is exposed to a series of non-written rules and classifications for the people, such as the one that happens in the airport waiting room. If this is true, then everything can be transformed in a meaningful sign, even the lack of them. Therefore, suppositions would also be a way to define people. Obviously, as they are so ambiguous, they may lead to the creation of prejudices.

The objective of this paper is, then, interpreting how the absence of information can be used as a description. In this story, a woman simply called “the Beauty” is never defined by what she is, but rather by what she is not. In fact, we deduce how she is like after the authors has set many contrasts between her and the other characters. After reading the text, we discover that the narrative theory must deepen into other character description procedures. So far, narrative studies have focused in “positive” description, that is, descriptions based on the characters’ traits, not in the lack of them. We conclude that García Márquez uses a very infrequent narrative procedure, the inverse description patterns. We will dare to name such procedure *aporetic description*.

Of course, as literature tries to mirror reality, we can infer that such situation may also happen in the situations of social interaction. We discover that, indeed, judging by appearances could be a sign within social relations. Through this procedure, we might create the other. So, García Márquez makes us realize something important: we may imagine other people in any way we want.

1. What is an aporia?

The word aporia comes from the Greek *ἀπορία* (derived from *a*, a negative prefix, and *poros*, and exit) So far, it seems that aporia has been regarded just as a mere rhetoric figure; therefore, it appears as it has been confined to the meaningful, and perhaps even philosophical side of narration, rather than a narrative technique in itself, with its very own descriptive possibilities. Besides, the inverse descriptions are very infrequent in Latin American literature. Therefore this short story conveys a noticeable uniqueness to the narrative written in Spanish.

There is consensus in defining an aporia as “a proposition with no logical end, such as an insuperable logical difficulty” (Ferrater 2000, 34). Some scholars also describe the aporia at the last part of problems with multiple favorable solutions (Müller and Halder 1981, 32). Others have called it “an insuperable deadlock, or ‘double bind,’ of incompatible or contradictory meanings which are ‘undecidable,’ in that we lack any sufficient ground for choosing among them” (Abrams, 1999, 59). In

his classic work, Austin (1955) starts a classification about the locutionary and illocutionary acts as tries to distinguish, as opposed things, a constative expression and a realizative expression. He even comments the philosophical implication of nonsense and why semi-utterances can exist and be inaccurately taken as authentic utterances. However, it is clear that his reflection is entirely devoted to verifiable performance, not to its absence.

But in this short story, just the opposite happens: signification derives not from the “positive” attribution of characteristics, but precisely from its absence. In fact, García Márquez defines his character of the Beauty through a number of actions she does not do. This technique would be determined by a fact which is very evident but also very complex: the Beauty is never defined by what she is, but rather by what she is not. In fact, we do not even know the Beauty’s name. Apart from her prettiness, her elegance and her little command of the English and the French language, we have no description of her traits. We know that she travels from Paris to New York, but we ignore the reason of her trip. There are also many other things that we may deduce about her, but –again- it comes from the contrasts between her and other characters. In fact, all the descriptions that we have about the Beauty are “negative”. They are absences, voids. All we know about her is that she does not do what normal people do.

Now, let us see in detail, in which ways García Márquez applied these inverse patterns to define the characters and the plot he has created.

2 The characters: *The World and Their World*

2.1 The social interaction

Let us begin by analyzing the environment in the airport and in the airplane. By understanding these two places, the characters’ social interaction will be defined. The result will be that the characters’ personal traits will indirectly be set. According to Rimmon-Kennan there are several criteria that may determine the traits of a character. One of those is the way in which the character speaks: “A character’s speech, whether in conversation or as a silent activity of the mind, can be indicative of a trait or traits, both through its content and through its form” (Rimmon-Kennan 2001, 65)

Direct dialogues belong exclusively to the Narrator. The remarks from other minor characters are only compulsory replies within a dialogue the Narrator himself had begun. He expresses himself in two ways: an internal one (monologues) and an external one (dialogues with other characters)

“What a character says, how he or she says it, and in what context he or she speaks can be a particularly effective and economical way of characterizing not only the speaking characters, but also those spoken to, and those spoken about” (O Neill 1996: 51).

This suggests that García Márquez focused his attention in the Narrator’s dialogues precisely because the meaningful charge is upon this character: it is his insecurity what triggers all the plot. The reader can instantly perceive that the Narrator is neither an ignorant nor a clumsy man, so he should not have had any obstacles in order to start a conversation with the Beauty.

The Beauty, on her turn, only expresses herself in an external way, because during some moments she talks to other characters (including the Narrator) but the reader never has access to her thoughts. Finally, the conversations that other characters have among themselves, are very short. They are also narrated indirectly: the reader never “hears” the direct words the characters uttered. Let us now focus on the main characters.

2.2 The Beauty

The entire plot revolves around her. She is a very attractive young woman and the Narrator is struck by her beauty. He wastes no time to describe the object of his admiration.

“She was beautiful, elastic, she had a tender, bread-colored skin and almond-like green eyes, and her hair was straight and black and long up to her back... ‘This is the most beautiful woman I have seen in my life’, I thought, when I saw her walking with her silent lioness steps... It was a supernatural apparition that existed only for an instant and disappeared within the multitude of the hall” (García Márquez 2000, 61).

As we will later see, the reader will never receive much information about this woman. Conversely, the few things we know about her are oppositions with other characters.

2.3 The anti prince

The Narrator is the sole important masculine character in the text; it is true that a steward appears in the last section of the story, but his presence is ephemeral and does not have any relevance for the plot. Despite the open allusions to the folkloric tale known as “The sleeping beauty”, García Márquez’s story separates from it. Being the masculine protagonist, the Narrator should be somehow equal to the prince that appears on the fairy tale. However, it does not happen that way. Traditional narratology has defined an anti hero as:

«a leading character in narrative or dramatic work, who fails to meet conventional ‘heroic’ expectations: e.g. courage, nobility, high achievement. It is often confused with the antagonist (a character who rivals another), and with villain (someone willing to perpetrate wicked or criminal acts). Antiheros are failures who do not live up either the audience or their own hopes» (Prince 2003, 19)

As we have seen, the Narrator appears from the very beginning of the story, because the narration is entirely homodiegetic. However, his main feature, which is cowardice, will not appear until the third sequence, that of the plane. In fact, at some point the Narrator will reproach himself his flimsiness: he tries to engage himself in a conversation with the Beauty, but he will not dare in the end

«When the plane stabilized, I had to resist the temptation of shaking her by any pretext, because the only thing I wanted in that last hour of travel was to see her awake, even if she would be mad, so that I would recover my freedom, and perhaps my youth too. But I didn’t dare. ‘Fuck –I said to myself, with a great condescendence- why am I not a Taurus!’ » (García Márquez 2000, 66).

Evidently, this trait does not correspond with the attitude the prince displays in the fairy tale: he awakes the sleeping beauty with a kiss of love that breaks the spell the evil witch cursed the heroin with.

2.4 The anti complication

The Narrator’s cowardice leads us to a new situation; this situation is unknown in the folk tales, and not extremely common in contemporary narrations. Since the Narrator is unable to wake the Beauty up and take her out of her lethargy, he becomes what we have called “the anti prince”. However, we will dare to call the situation itself the *anti complication*. Let us see it in detail.

Conventional theory establishes that the complication is “the part of a narrative following the exposition and leading to the denouement, the middle of an action, the complicating action, the

raveling. In the traditional plot structure, it is the rising action (from exposition to climax)” (Prince 2003, 59). If we keep this in mind, then we must consider a situation like this one, where the protagonist could have resolved the problem and he did not. We will dare to call the situation an *anti erotic* situation. Such situation is what renders the protagonist a failure, as we have seen before.

2.5 The foil figure

In the folkloric tale “The sleeping beauty”, the protagonist has a powerful enemy, the witch. In this story we can find a character that is somehow the antithesis of the Beauty. That character is the Dutch old lady. The opposition between the Beauty and the old lady are set from the very beginning, when the Narrator is mesmerized by the Beauty yet instantly rejects the old lady: “I was in the registry row behind a Dutch old lady that spent almost an hour discussing the weight of her eleven bags... I didn’t know how the quarrel ended” (García Márquez 2000, 61). Later, already in the plane, we find a similar scene, in which the contrasts between the Beauty and the Dutch lady appear again

«Two rows behind mine the lady with the eleven bags laid down, spread in a bad way on her seat. She looked like a dead body, forgotten on a battlefield. On the floor, in the middle of the aisle, were her reading glasses with the colored-bead necklace, and for an instant I enjoyed the mean delight of not picking them up» (García Márquez 2000, 66).

As we can see, the narrative function of the old lady is emphasizing the Beauty’s ethereal features, such as the inaccessibility and the way she differs from the crowd. In this case, the term *villain* does not seem to apply, for the Dutch lady does not really execute any action that may be destined to destroy the Beauty or to be an obstacle for her desires. Semioticians have discussed the functions of the *antagonist* (Greimas and Courtés 1979, 23) but this category does not seem to apply either, for the lady never rivals the Beauty: they ignore one another. In fact, the reader only becomes aware of the difference between them when the Narrator mentions it. Narratologists have added that other categories have similar roles; among those categories we have the *villain* and the *opponent* (Auger 2010, 19).

Others have said that “a character in a work who, by sharp contrast, serves to stress and highlight the distinctive temperament of the protagonist is termed a foil” (Abrams, 1999, 224). Perhaps this is the most suitable definition for the Dutch lady, for she does not rival in any way with the Beauty. The Dutch old lady is only a character that is in opposition to the Beauty, but it is not hostile to her in any way, neither direct nor indirect. We can see it is only an aesthetic difference set by the Narrator, not a direct conflictive action between the two women. This multiple opposition can be explained through the following table:

Beauty	Unknown nationality	Young	Discreet	Elegant
Old Lady	Dutch	Old	Impertinent	Ungraceful

If it is true that the old lady’s nationality is clearly determined –from the very beginning we are told she is Dutch- the origin of the Beauty is imprecise. She had «an aura of antiquity that could have been either from Indonesia or the Andes» (García Márquez 2000, 61). This fact will be emphasized later, when it is said that the Beauty commands (but not very well) several languages: she talks to the steward «first in an inaccessible French and then in a slightly easier English» (García Márquez 2000, 64). We can only ask ourselves why the Beauty sets a linguistic difference between the Narrator and the

steward. In other words, why she addresses herself to the steward in a basic French and English but she talks to the Narrator in Spanish in the first place.

3 Narrative forms and functions

The entire story is written in an autodiegetic point of view, for the narrator is also the protagonist of the narration (Genette 1988, 245) That is the reason why all the verbs are conjugated in the first person singular. The story has three main sequences in which the action is developed through. These elements set the environment in which the action takes place. Therefore, they determine the actions that other characters, especially the Narrator, will execute and the Beauty will not. We will immediately consider them:

3.1 Initial sequence

This is the first section of the story. It happens in the Charles de Gaulle, the airport of Paris, while the characters are checking in before the flight. The Beauty is presented as the central axis of the whole story. Besides, as the narration is autodiegetic the narrator is also established as a character. The foil character also appears. We have already discussed the functions of the characters.

3.2 Pause sequence

Once the basic characters (the Beauty, the Narrator and the Foil) have appeared, we immediately face a second sequence, that of the airport waiting area. It occurs in the middle of the story, when the Narrator has no choice other than waiting for the storm to stop. Then, he decides to look for the Beauty, but it is in vain, for he does not find her. As there are no significant actions in the plot, we can easily consider this sequence as a long pause: “The pause is the minimum discursive speed, where, for example, more or less lengthy passages of narration of a descriptive, reflective or essayistic nature correspond to no events at all in the story” (O’Neill 1996, 43). It is noteworthy that the Foil character also disappears. In this sort of interlude the action does not advance. Its sole function seems to be that of emphasizing the Beauty’s absence, for she never appears in any of the places where the Narrator visits. This sequence seems to be destined not just to decelerate the rhythm of the narration. It also introduces the first two contrasts between the Beauty and her ephemeral surroundings. In the first place, the contrast between the beauty and the multitude is set. In the second place, some temperature differences among the places in which the story takes place are set. We will immediately consider them

3.2.1 Contrast Beauty vs. Passengers

The first contrast belongs to the Individual vs. Society type. All through the story, we are told that the Beauty is not like most people. This process begins to happen in what we will call the *search sequence*: this one is a section in which the narrator starts look for the Beauty in every corner of Charles De Gaulle’s airport. There are at least three moments that depict the Narrator’s frustrated quest

3.2.2 The first class waiting room

The first place where the Narrator looks for the Beauty is the first class waiting room. This is how the author explains it: “Suddenly I thought that one was an adequate shelter for the Beauty, and I looked for her in other rooms, shivering because of my own audacity. But most of the people were real-life men, who read newspapers in English while their women thought about other men” (García Márquez 2002, 62).

3.2.3 The tourist class waiting room

As the Narrator does not find the Beauty in the first class waiting room, he goes to another. And he describes the situation this way:

“People of all kinds had flooded the waiting rooms, and they were camping on the suffocating hallways, and even on the stairways, lying on the floor with their animals and their children, and their

baggage... I could not resist the idea that the Beauty may had also been somewhere in the middle of those mild hordes, and that fantasy gave me new vigor to go on” (García Márquez 2002, 63).

3.2.4 The restaurants and the restrooms

As the narrator is still unable to find the Beauty, he goes to a third place. And the outcome is the same: the pretty woman is not there either. García Márquez writes it this way: “The rows became endless in front of the restaurants... and the crowd started to smell like a herd. It was the time for instincts” (García Márquez 2000, 63).

As we can see, all these places are presented in a descendent order, from the most refined to the most vulgar. This situation actualizes what we will dare to call *Place sophistication index*. Its meaning is emphasized by the function of the places in which the action happens and by the urgency of the actions of people. In the first location, we recognize an element of superfluity, such as the fresh roses used to decorate. In the second location, we recognize an element of necessity, such as the baggage. In the third location we recognize an element of urgency, such as the need to eat and evacuate.

3.3 The trip sequence

We would call the last sequence the trip sequence. It is there where the meaning core of the story takes place. Only then the Narrator’s physical traits are effectively sketched and therefore the contrast between him and the Beauty happens. We can determine three contrasts between the Narrator and the Beauty

3.3.1 Biological contrast

As it has been said, the long pause in the previous section, sets a contrast between the Beauty and her environment. She is indifferent to the collectivity. The Narrator looks for her, but she is not anywhere. Then the main plot continues: the Narrator enters the plane and the Beauty sits beside him. From this point on, all the verbs will be in simple past, and not in imperfect, as they had previously been. There are at least two contrasts (i) the action contrasts which are four; and (ii) one contrast which we will dare to call an ontological contrast. The first contrast is this: the narrator consumes an alcoholic beverage, but the Beauty does not: “the steward took us the reception champagne. I took a glass in order to offer it to her, but I repented just I time, for she just wanted a glass of water” (García Márquez 2000, 64). The second contrast is produced because the Narrator stays awake and the Beauty sleeps; she “wore the mask, she turned around on the armchair, not facing me, and she slept without a single pause, without a sigh”. However, the Narrator remains awake: “it was impossible for me to escape, not even for a second, the spell of that fabulous creature that slept by my side” (García Márquez 2000, 64). The third contrast is this: the Narrator eats the dinner that he is served in the airplane, while the Beauty keeps on sleeping placidly: “I had a lonely dinner, silently telling myself all that I would have told her if she had been awake” (García Márquez 2000, 65) We face the fourth contrast when we realize that, just as it had happened during the pause at the airport, the Beauty does not execute any corporal function. But the Narrator does, just like all normal people. We can see an example in this quote: “After getting rid of the excesses of champagne, I surprised myself in the mirror, unworthy and ugly... with the illusion that only the turbulences of God would awake the Beauty and that she would have to shelter herself in my arms... but the Beauty’s sleep was invincible” (García Marquez 2000, 65).

This series of oppositions can be systematized in the following table

Narrator	Drinks alcohol	Stays awake	Eats	Evacuates
Beauty	Does not drink	Does not stay awake	Does not eat	Does not evacuate

As we see, the only action that the Beauty executes is sleeping. And this is an action that we dare to call an action of absence, for it is a passive act, out of the tangible reality, in “another world”.

3.3.2 Ontological contrast

This is the information we are given about the Beauty: “As she seemed not to be more than twenty years old, I consoled myself with the idea that it wouldn’t be a wedding ring, but that of an ephemeral engagement” (García Márquez 2000, 65). On the other hand, this is the information we are given about the Narrator: “That night, watching over the Beauty’s sleep, not only I understood that senile refinement, but I also lived it to the fullest” (García Márquez 2000, 66).

This is an important feature, because it provides further information about the characters. In fact, O’Neill says that

“characters’ external appearance can be used in at least suggestive evidence for or against them, whether these factors are within the character’s control (slovenly dress, for example) or beyond them (old and ugly...) . Finally, a character can be effectively contrasted with another character used as a systematic foil, as in the case of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza” (O Neill 1996: 51)

Therefore, the ontological contrast is what at last materializes the impossible romance between the Narrator and Beauty: there are both completely incompatible; he is old and ugly while she is beautiful and young.

4 Miscellaneous meaning elements

Within the airport waiting room sequence, we can identify two minor elements of meaning. They neither contribute powerfully to the plot, nor define the characters. However, they emphasize the dramatic atmosphere of the story

4.1 Temperature

The first element is related to the temperature changes the characters experience. For example, the airline employee tells then Narrator that “this morning the radio announced that this one will be the biggest snowstorm this year” (García Márquez 2000, 62). Later, the Narrator emphasizes the contradictions in the temperatures saying that the employee “was wrong: it was the biggest snowstorm in the century” (Idem). Yet more, in the first class waiting room “the spring was so real that there were alive roses in the vases and even the canned music seemed so sublime and soothing as its creators wanted” (Idem). However, later on the Narrator tells us that “After noon there was not one available spot and the heat had become so insufferable that I escaped to breathe” (García Márquez 2000, 63).

4.2 Topic opposition

In the second place, the isolation which the airport is in during the snowstorm provides an opposition of the *inside* vs. *outside* kind. This is the way García Márquez explains it: “Provided that all the communication with the city was interrupted and the transparent, plastic palace seemed an immense space capsule clogged in the middle of the storm” (García Márquez 2000,63).

This means that both elements can be systematically expressed in the following chart

INSIDE	OUTSIDE
Hot Crowded	Cold Isolated

As we can see, both elements provide a contrast for the context in which the characters act. In such a way the tension goes *in crescendo*.

The narratological relevance of this contrast has two aspects. The first one is paradoxical: if it is true that the temperature appears, the temperature is subordinated to the presence of the airport. We are told that the temperature outdoors is freezing, but inside of the building it is very hot. This fact creates the opposition between inside vs. outside and it can be easily associated with a symbol of contemporary life: despite its big technological advances (expressed by the presence of the air transportation system) modern society finds itself isolated and divided in social and economic groups; let us remember that the Narrator's search is "descending": he begins to look for the Beauty in the first class waiting room, then he goes to the tourist class and finally to the restaurants and the restrooms.

The second aspect functions as a warning. The contrast between the rigorous winter and the roses, forecast the protagonists' age difference. That matter will be vital in order to sustain the dramatic core of the story, which is the impossibility of the protagonists' erotic encounter due to their ages. In fact, while the story takes place in a winter environment, which would allude the Narrator's age, the living roses would refer to the Beauty's youth.

Conclusions

Obviously, this short story derives from the folkloric tale of the Sleeping Beauty. However, it has many characteristics that are common in contemporary literature but are impossible in fairy tales. That is why we may reach two conclusions that form the innermost meaning core of the plot.

(i) From the formal point of view: After reading García Márquez's text, we discover that the narrative theory must deepen into other character description procedures. So far, narrative studies have focused in "positive" description, that is, descriptions based in the characters' traits, not in the lack of them. We can understand that these features make "The Sleeping Beauty's airplane" a masterpiece of Latin American literature. In fact, this short story sets many innovative narrative procedures.

As we have previously discussed, the story is a lineal narration, which does not offer any innovation in the narrative point of view, such as temporal breaks or confusion between the characters and the narrators. But while this is true, the story does develop a very original description system, which is based not on noticeable traits of the Beauty, but precisely on their absence.

(ii) From the reflexive point of view. The story also conveys some reflections about the contemporary lifestyle. We will only name them: ephemeral social relations, isolation, social conventions and communication failures are among the major subject this text considers. Fraticelli says that this story takes the first step in a process that involves the reader in a sociological and literary transgression:

"perhaps in order to recover a sentimental and human dimension in a landscape which is dominated by the alienation and the frenzy. Even in the weather aspect, the contradiction between the snow that is outdoors and the artificial spring that is created indoors, insists in the separation that exists between the unreal space of the airport and the reality that surrounds it" (Fraticelli 2010, 79).

In fact, the story emphasizes in the momentary features of the human relations within modern society. This volatility is produced by the agitated and chaotic pace in which social interaction happens nowadays. Besides, the story warns us about the most noticeable feature of mankind, its smallness before the world. So, despite the advanced technology that has allowed us to build sophisticated flying machines, Humanity keeps being vulnerable to climatic events –which are obviously unforeseeable– and that generates chaos and instability in a whole group.

Being mimetic per se, literature may be a testimony of the way in which we behave ourselves in our everyday life. So, it can function as "the anticipation, as a shadow of the fact, consists of this: we might be able to think now something that has never occurred in fact" (Wittengstein 1969, 313). But we can

ask ourselves what sort of things we can predict if we do not have any evidence, as it happens in the case of the Beauty: we redefine the other, we imagine the other in the way that best suits us.

“This proximity is not the ontical one; it is precise to take into account the ontical repetition of this thought about what is near and what is far. We still have to say that the being is nothing, that it is not something existent, it cannot be predicated, it can only be said in the ontical metaphor. And the election of such or such metaphor is necessarily meaningful. In the metaphorical insistence, then, is where the being meaning interpretation is produced” (Derrida 1989, 169).

Therefore, as García Márquez shows us, even when we lack of evidence to judge, we end up doing it: the whole plot of this short story deals with the Beauty, but beside her prettiness, we do not know much about her. We can only wonder if the Narrator would be so fascinated with her if she was a murderer.

With the creation of the Beauty, García Márquez has proved something. It is possible to describe a character without mentioning the things it does, but rather focusing on how the character differs from its context, as it refuses to be what the others are forced to because of the circumstances.

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¹ All translations are ours.

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