Susan Hill

LUGAR Y AÑO DE NACIMIENTO DE SUSAN HILL:

Susan Hill nació en Scarborough (North Yorkshire, Inglaterra) en el año 1942 y actualmente tiene 77 años.

OBSERVACIONES GENERALES SOBRE LA OBRA DE SUSAN HILL:

Susan Hill ha escrito, hasta el momento, unas sesenta obras que abarcan distintos géneros como la novela, el relato breve, obras de no ficción, a la par que obras autobiográficas. Tras haber sufrido diferentes experiencias personales traumáticas, que la marcaron profundamente — como es al caso de la muerte de su prometido, David Lepine, a causa de una grave enfermedad y la muerte de su segunda hija, Imogen, a los pocos días de nacer — Susan Hill publicó su novela *La Mujer de Negro* (1983) cuando contaba con 40 años de edad; obra que supuso un punto de inflexión en su carrera como escritora.

Tras la estela de su novela más popular, *La Mujer de Negro* — que se convirtió en un fenómeno literario, teatral y cinematográfico — en una etapa más reciente de creatividad, Susan Hill ha publicado una serie de novelas y una antología de relatos breves que se enmarcan dentro del género gótico y, en particular, dentro del género de relatos de fantasmas. En varias ocasiones, la escritora ha declarado su intención de rendir homenaje a clásicos del género que fueron, en su mayoría, publicados durante la época victoriana. La obra más reciente de Susan Hill perteneciente a este género abarca narraciones de fantasmas de corte neo-victoriano que tratan de recrear y homenajear a los cuentos clásicos del género escritos por Charles Dickens, Oscar Wilde, M.R.James y Henry James, entre otros, y que presentan una constante intertextualidad con obras de la tradición gótica decimonónica.

Tomando en consideración sus escritos autobiográficos, como su obra *Family* (1989), en la que la autora narra en primera persona la tragedia que supuso perder a su segunda hija, Imogen, y su deseo constante de ser madre tras sufrir varios abortos espontáneos, sus narraciones de ficción gótica — precisamente, a causa de su gran profundidad psicológica — reflejan estas temáticas de forma significativa hasta el punto de que su obra de género gótico más reciente es susceptible de ser interpretada desde una perspectiva autobiográfica y de género.

En sus narraciones góticas también ocupa un lugar central la interacción entre memoria e imaginación, así como la superposición de diferentes etapas vitales que traen a colación la artificialidad de las divisiones temporales en relación a la edad y el envejecimiento, a la par que puede identificarse como, en narraciones relatadas por diferentes personajes, el pasado y el presente se intercalan de manera constante. Las etapas vitales a menudo se entremezclan mediante narradores homodiegéticos que rememoran su juventud y que son descritos como jóvenes personajes a quienes les sobreviene la madurez y el envejecimiento de forma repentina debido a experiencias personales traumáticas. En las obras de género gótico de la autora, también proliferan personajes mayores que, o bien son infantilizados a través del retrato que se hace de ellos, o bien son rejuvenecidos de forma artificial, así como personajes que, pese a su niñez, envejecen de forma prematura debido a diferentes circunstancias.

Asimismo, en la obra gótica tardía de la autora aparecen un número importante de personajes mayores cuyo retrato perpetúa arquetipos victorianos de la vejez presentes en novelas del escritor Charles Dickens — por

quien la autora ha declarado una gran admiración — como puede ser el personaje de Ebenezer Scrooge de *Canción de Navidad* o el personaje de Miss Havisham en *Grandes Esperanzas*. Legado también de los cuentos populares, algunos de estos personajes, descritos a través de su vejez, se asemejan también a arquetipos muy presentes en el colectivo imaginario, como es el caso de los arquetipos del sabio o de la bruja, que manifiestan una caracterización eminentemente ambivalente de la vejez.

CITAS AUTOBIOGRÁFICAS RELEVANTES DE SUSAN HILL:

Influencia del cuento clásico de fantasmas victoriano:

"The traditional, classic English ghost story, like the traditional classic English detective story, has its origins in the nineteenth century […] as we recognise the forms, they were really Victorian; that period was when they were formed, that was when every self-respecting writer, good and bad, turned his or her hand to one, or both. […] The classic ghost story still has tremendous power to chill and alarm, to make us turn our heads to look behind us and dread to walk up the dark staircase to bed at night. That is partly because its strength lies in under — not over — statement. Its art is the art of omission, of suggestion, not of crude and explicit description. But, even more important, it is frightening because it has its roots in the real world." (Susan Hill. "Introduction." *Ghost Stories Collected by Susan Hill*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1983. 9-11)

"All writers are asked about their influences and it is a hard question to answer correctly because almost everything we read is an influence, and usually quite unconsciously. Other people's ways of writing can surface in one's own years later, influences but barely recognisable as such. But a few are known and those few are the ones that strike a chord at the moment of reading." (Susan Hill. *Howards End is on the Landing: A Year of Reading from Home*. London: Profile Books, 2009. 142)

La experiencia de la maternidad y la pérdida de su segunda hija Imogen:

"I did manage to write another book, a ghost novel called *The Woman in Black* […] I wrote my book in seven weeks — and at every available opportunity, quizzed Julie about obstetrics and gynaecology, fertility and infertility. I was obsessed by my need to become pregnant and, in a strange way, that is what the desire becomes — not for a baby so much as simply to succeed in getting pregnant, being in that state." (Susan Hill. *Family*. London: Penguin Books, 1989. 114)

"For about a year, I was depressed — not just a bit miserable, a bit low, but properly, clinically depressed. When I woke each morning, a sense of doom and misery that there was another day to face seemed to lie like a stone in the pit of my stomach. I had no interest in anything very much — family, work, the world around me, holidays, friends, — everything was an effort, a drag. I was irritable, and short tempered. I nagged at Stanley, turned on Jessica, could not bear anyone's company for long, but was afraid to be mysefl for fear of —? Of nothing, really. Just fear. I was gripped several times a day by uncontrollable fear, panic, when I wanted to run away somewhere, pull a blanket over my head and hide." (Susan Hill. *Family*. London: Penguin Books, 1989. 121)

"For my own part, I learned a great deal about myself, and the experience was more than worthwhile. I learned about the strengths of my own feminine and female needs, about the passionate desire to bear a child and how it can overcome any obstacles and dominate your life and every waking thought, and take over your reason. It is a force for which I now have the utmost respect." (Susan Hill. *Family*. London: Penguin Books, 1989. 286).

"And Imogen. Oh, I remembered Imogen, I looked round for her in the garden, for she was always there, somewhere just out of reach, out of sight, always with me. She was who she was, entirely herself, for that brief time, though who knows what she, too, would have become? In her, I saw perfect, holy innocence." (Susan Hill. *Family*. London: Penguin Books, 1989. 294).

CITAS RELEVANTES EXTRAÍDAS DE LAS NOVELAS DE SUSAN HILL:

Superposición de diferentes etapas vitales:

“They led here, to this woman with beginnings of grey hair, staring out of the mirror. They were that person. Me. And yet they were not, they were ghosts, and they had vanished, Where to? Where? They were not dead, as she was dead, but they no more existed than the newborn baby or toddling child I had also once been. How many selves do we contain, like Russian dolls concealed within one another?” (Susan Hill. *Mrs de Winter*. London: Vintage, 1999. 324-5)

“The age did not matter, I knew now that one some days I was older than my mother had been, as old as it was possible ever to be, and on others, a very few — today was one — I was the age I had been when I had met Maxim, and would never alter or grow older. Most of the time, if I thought of it at all, I was some dull, indeterminate middle age.” (Susan Hill. *Mrs de Winter*. London: Vintage, 1999. 193)

Jóvenes narradores envejecidos por experiencias traumáticas:

“Telling the story had been like a purgation and now my head felt curiously light, my body in that limp state such as follows upon a fever or a fright. But I reflected that I could, from this moment on, only get better, because I could only move step by steady step away from those awful happenings, as surely as time went on.

‘Well,’ he said at last. ‘You have come a long way since the night I met you on the late train.’

‘It feels like a hundred years ago. I feel like another man’.” (Susan Hill. *The Woman in Black*. London: Vintage, 1998. 145)

Personajes fantasmagóricos jóvenes únicamente en apariencia:

“Though not any medical expert, I had heard of certain conditions which caused such terrible wasting, such ravages of the flesh, and knew that they were generally regarded as incurable, and it seemed poignant that a woman, who was perhaps only a short time away from her own death, should drag herself to a funeral of another. Nor did she look old. The effect of the illness made her age hard to guess, but she was quite possible no more than thirty.” (Susan Hill. *The Woman in Black*. 49)

“The body was that of a young woman aged around twenty-five to twenty-eight. She was severely malnourished, but this would not have accounted for her having the vocal cords, larynx and lungs of someone over seventy years, who had been a heavy tobacco smoker.” (Susan Hill. *Printer’s Devil Court*. London: Profile Books, 2014. 82-3)

Infancia y juventud envejecida prematuramente:

“When we had both looked at it at last we were children and the doll was a baby doll, with staring bright blue eyes, a painted rosebud mouth and a smooth china face, neck, arms, legs and body. It was an artificial-looking thing but it was as like a human baby as any doll can ever be.

Now, we both stared in horror at the thing on table in front of us. It was not a baby, but a wizened old woman, a crone, with a few wisps of twisted greasy grey hair, a mouth slightly open to reveal a single black tooth, and the face gnarled and wrinkled like a tree trunk, with lines and pockmarks. It was sallow, the eyes were sunken and the lids creased with age, the lips thin and hard.” (Susan Hill. *Dolly*. London: Profile Books, 2013. 115)

“I felt as if I were dissolving, or perhaps shrivelling. I was not faint or light-hearted. I had a feeling that I was decaying. It is the only way I can describe it. I was becoming old and I was dying, slowly. Oxygen was giving out, though I could still just breathe, but when I did, the air smelled noxious. I had a sensation of creeping flesh and of things squirming beneath my feet. Everything was being absorbed into this horrible disintegration — the walls and stairs, the doors and the ceiling, the light fittings, the floor. And my own body. There seemed to be not only

no clean air but no hope, no future, nothing joyous or pleasant left in existence. I was becoming mould. I looked at the backs of my hands and they were a greenish-white, with a bloom like the surface of mushrooms which have begun to turn. It was a terrifying, horrible sensation, and I could not get away from it or struggle out of it. How long I stood on the stairs in its grip I do not know — it felt like eternity but I actually think it was only a fleeting second. Time had expanded and contracted and I was totally confused." (Susan Hill. "Alice Baker." *The Travelling Bag and Other Ghostly Stories*. London: Profile Books, 2016. 102-3)

Personajes mayores rejuvenecidos o infantilizados mediante retratos grotescos:

"I guessed that she must be well into her nineties. Sitting next to me, she seemed more like a moth than a bird, with the brilliant blue eyes glinting at me out of the pale skin, but I noticed that she was made up with rouge and powder and that her nails were painted. She had a high forehead behind which the hair was puffed out, and a beaky, bony nose, a thin line of mouth. Her cheekbones were high, too, and I thought that, with the blue of her eyes and with flesh on her distinguished bones, she might well have been a considerable beauty in her youth." (Susan Hill. *The Man in the Picture*. London: Profile Books, 2008. 62)

"She looked up at me. Her eyes were watery and pale, like the eyes of most very old people, but there was something about the look in them that unnerved me. Her skin was powdery and paper-thin, her nose a bony hook. It was impossible to guess her age. And yet there was a strange beauty about her, a decaying, desiccated beauty, but it held my gaze for all that. She seemed to belong with those dried and faded flowers people used to press between pages, or with a bowl of old potpourri that exudes a faint, sweet, ghostly scent when it is disturbed. Yet when she spoke again her voice was clear and sharp, with an elegant pronunciation." (Susan Hill. *The Small Hand*. London: Profile Books, 2010. 142-4)

"'Solange! Come in. Is everything all right for you? Would you like some coffee?'

Solange looked slowly round the room, eyes resting on every surface, every object, and then out of the window onto the garden, and then back to Belinda. Hers were odd eyes, pebble-coloured with a needle of yellow at their centre.

Belinda cleared her throat. 'Do come and sit down.'

'There's a nasty draught in that room.'

'Is there? I'm sorry, Solange. I'll check your windows and if it isn't that, Norman will have a look when he gets home.'

'Nobody comes.'

'Solange, don't just stand there — talking of draughts. Come in and have coffee.' (Susan Hill. "The Front Room." *The Travelling Bag and Other Ghostly Stories*. London: Profile Books, 2016. 160-1).

El arquetipo de la bruja:

"I had had all sorts of wild imaginings about the state of her house. I had expected it, perhaps, to be a shrine to the memory of a past time, or to her youth, or to the memory of her husband of so short a time, like the house of poor Miss Havisham." (Susan Hill. *The Woman in Black*. London: Vintage Books, 1998. 69)

"I saw a round table and, beside it though set back a little, a chair, in which sat an old woman. The glow came from a single dim lamp which stood on the table, its lights veiled by some kind of reddish-coloured cloth. The woman wore a scarf, tied gypsy-fashion about her forehead, and she seemed to be dressed in shawls of some dark flowing stuff. All of this I no more than glimpsed at me, though how much she could see of me in the dimness I do not know. But I saw her. I saw the black pits of her eyes with a pin-prick gleam at their centre, and

a swarthiness and greasiness about her skin; I saw her hands laid on top of one another, old, scrawny, claw-like hands they seemed to me; and the flash of a spark from some jewelled or enamelled ring." (Susan Hill. *The Mist in the Mirror*. London: Profile Books, 1999. 39)

El arquetipo del sabio:

"The story was told to me by my old tutor, Theo Parmitter, as we sat beside the fire in his college rooms one bitterly cold January night. There were still real fires in those days, the coals brought up by the servant in huge brass scuttles. I had travelled down from London to see my old friend, who was by then well into his eighties, hale and hearty and with a mind as sharp as ever, but crippled by severe arthritis so that he had difficulty leaving his rooms. The college looked after him well. He was one of a dying breed, the old Cambridge bachelor for whom his college was his family. He had lived in this handsome set for over fifty years and he would be content to die here." (Susan Hill. *The Man in the Picture*. London: Profile Books, 2007. 1)

"Fergus never looks old. Fergus is ageless. He will look the same when he is ninety as he did the day I met him, when we were both eighteen and in our first week at Balliol. He has never left Oxford and he never will. He married a don, Helena, a world expert on some aspect of early Islamic art, they live in a tiny, immaculate house in a lane off the lower Woodstock Road, they take their holidays in countries like Jordan and Turkistan. They have no children, but if they ever did, those children would be, as so many children of Oxford academics have always been, born old." (Susan Hill. *The Small Hand*. London: Profile Books, 2010. 38)

PUBLICACIONES:

Miquel-Baldellou, Marta. "'I wanted to be old': Gender and Aging in Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* and Susan Hill's *Mrs de Winter*." (pendiente de publicación)

Miquel-Baldellou, Marta. "'Old, scrawny, claw-like hands they seemed to me': Folktale Witches and Fairies in Susan Hill's Gothic Narratives." (pendiente de evaluación)

Miquel-Baldellou, Marta. 'It made her age hard to guess' Evoking *Dracula* through Images of Aging in Susan Hill's *The Woman in Black*." (pendiente de evaluación)

Miquel-Baldellou, Marta. "'The business was beginning to sound like something from a Victorian novel': Susan Hill's *The Woman in Black* in the Victorian Mirror." (pendiente de evaluación)

Miquel-Baldellou, Marta. "'Now, I was that old man': Images of Aging and the Mirror of Old Age in Susan Hill's *The Mist in the Mirror*." (pendiente de evaluación)

Miquel-Baldellou, Marta. "'I do feel a bit responsible… She's well over eighty': Ambivalent Portrayals of Old Age in Susan Hill's Later Fiction." (pendiente de evaluación)

Miquel-Baldellou, Marta. "Age Frozen in Art: Subverting Age in Susan Hill's *The Man in the Picture* and *Dolly*." (pendiente de evaluación)

POR: Marta Miquel-Baldellou mmiquel@dal.udl.cat [mailto:mmiquel@dal.udl.cat]