Anna Myrberg

_Humorist but also a serious poet_

Behind the pseudonym ‘Black Mask’ we find the author Anna Fredrika Myrberg (1878-1931). Together with her mother she moved from Värmland in western Sweden to Stockholm to find employment after her father died. She trained to be a photo-engraver. She found work both at a photographer’s studio and at a Stockholm newspaper. Through her writing she came to be one of the city’s best-known personalities. Sometimes she read her texts to small audiences and apparently left them writhing with laughter.

It isn’t easy to find out what Anna Myrberg was like as a person. Some sources describe her as lonesome and unhappy, while others say she was happy, strong, and independent. However, it does appear that she was a rather serious person despite her humorous texts. She had a hunchback and “dragged one leg behind her when she walked.” “Look — there’s the Black Mask!” children would shout when they saw her. Sometimes she had to write standing up because her back hurt so much, and that would not exactly make life easier, of course.

But she did write; "idiot poems", vignettes, and comic sketches, but also lyrics for revue couplets and hits. Some were truly popular, like “Saturday waltz.” It starts with “Come with me, Augusta, put your arm around my neck . . .” Ask some elderly Swedish person, and maybe you’ll get a song and a nostalgic look.

Her tales about the mischievous boy Willy Anderson was also turned into a screenplay for a film by the same name, made in 1929.

Anna Myrberg’s specialty was to write in Southside Stockholm slang. She wasn’t the first to do so. Emil Norlander, for example, wrote “Anderson’s Charlie” in 1901. But nobody had ever written Swedish history in that way.

Myrberg shows her serious sides in a collection of poems filled with smallness and fragility. For instance, the poem “The Doll” contains these lines:

As a child, I remember I had
A doll, so dainty and fine,
   With long golden locks
And a dress of white muslin.
My mother sat and watched me play,
Slowly rolling her yarn.
She said: “I too have a doll,
And that doll is you, my child.

O, mother, the doll you owned,
Has been tossed hither and thither,
And her dress is no longer
As radiantly white as it was.

And her limbs have been twisted,
The rosy cheek is now pale,
Because the hands were not gentle
That played with your doll.

For her, your hair has turned gray,
And the tears are flowing still —
Tell me, mother, can you fix your doll
And make her like new again?

Selected Bibliography


*Svärjes historia: upptekknad i kärta drag av södergraben Ville Andeson* by Anna Myrberg, (Stockholm: Åhlén & Åkeslund, 1923).