Abstract


One aim of the present thesis is to depict the history of Swedish popular science in general, and the corresponding history of the genre of popular science in particular. Another aim is to show how this development has drawn energy and momentum from the interests which, for various reasons, have tried to bring science to the people. This historical account starts with the efforts of the Royal Swedish Academy of Science (founded in 1739) to spread its useful findings and finishes with the end of the 1920s and the genre of popular science, by then completely developed.

The study begins with a forerunner of later popularizations, namely the dissemination of useful knowledge associated with the early Academy of Science. Taking the eighteenth-century ideal of usefulness as its starting point, the Academy disseminated edifying knowledge about such things as cattle breeding and soil cultivation. An important aspect of these initiatives of popularization, differing from subsequent ones, was that they did not make any definite distinction between scientific and popular knowledge. A scientific observation could just as well be provided by farmers as by one of the Academy members.

This egalitarian or low science view of knowledge was gradually abandoned, and after the reorganization of the Academy in 1820, the institution served the specialized sciences. But when the earlier popular commitments was abandoned, a new space emerged for a new kind of popularization. Although several attempts were made at the beginning of the nineteenth century, it was mainly during the 1880s that the outlines of a genre of popular science could be described. This study shows how the genre was shaped outside the immediate control of the various sciences as an expression of political interests within the framework of adult education.

The aim was no longer to disseminate useful findings, but to offer the expanding working class the prerequisite conditions to participate in the political life. It was considered that the workers needed knowledge about the scientific view of the world, and the scientific method, in order to orientate themselves in the political life.

Even if the beginning occurred in the late 1880s, this study wants to emphasize that a definite genre of popular science existed only after the turn of the century. As the movement of adult education expanded, a number of new organizations emerged. Political reasons were still important, particularly after the franchise was extended to new groups of citizens at the beginning of the century. It was still considered that science played a decisive role regarding the workers' possibilities to participate in the political life. The most important difference concerned the size: as more and more people wanted to learn about the world of science, an increased amount of literature was required. It is against this background that the genre of popular science was established. The final breakthrough occurred during the 1920s, and at the same time the genre received its modern name, "popularvetenskap".

Keywords: popularization, popular science, expository science, popular education, university extension, low- and high science, interest, specialization, professionalization, Royal Swedish Academy of Science, Stockholm Workers' Institute, International Order of Goodtemplars, Jacob Berzelius, Anton Nyström, Oscar Olsson.