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Daniel Helsing: *Evolution, Fiction, and Popular Science*

ABSTRACT: From an evolutionary point of view, the existence of fiction poses an explanatory challenge. Naively, one would expect fiction to be shunned as deliberately conveyed falsehoods or as time-consuming unnecessaries. Yet fiction is ubiquitous in the human species. This challenge has been addressed over the past decades within the field known as literary Darwinism or Darwinian literary studies. In this talk, I review some of the most common accounts of fiction within this field. Furthermore, I discuss whether these accounts may shed light on literary non-fiction as well, in particular popular science dealing with physics and astronomy. Popular science is an interesting genre because modern science, with its non-intuitive scales and non-teleological explanations, challenges the human mind in unique ways, and popularizers need to convey science in a way that is understandable and enticing for humans. I argue that popular science indeed does draw upon some of the same cognitive abilities and has some of the same functions as fiction, and I illustrate this through examples from contemporary popular science.

PRESENTATION: Daniel Helsing is a PhD candidate in comparative literature at Lund University. His dissertation deals with contemporary popular science, and he is particularly interested in ways in which popular science meets the conceptual, emotional, and existential challenges that modern science poses. See also his webpage (http://www.sol.lu.se/en/person/DanielHelsing/).