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For a Good Time, Well, Don't Call Dad

By MARY DUENWALD

Sir Walter Scott was an author, not an evolutionary theorist. He wrote his poems and historical novels 40 years before Charles Darwin described the process of evolution — and well over a century before scientists began in earnest to apply principles of natural selection to the study of human nature.

Yet Scott, a 19th-century writer, apparently shared with modern evolutionary scientists the general notion that men tend to follow two basic mating strategies.

The new research is part of the fledgling field of Darwinian literary studies, in which scholars try to draw connections between literature and evolutionary science.

According to a new study, Scott's dark heroes, rebellious and promiscuous, and his proper heroes, law-abiding and monogamous, reflect the two types of men scientists recognize by the kinds of relationships they have with women: cads and dads.

In the study, 257 women in college were asked to read passages from Scott's novels. Each read a paragraph describing a dark hero and one describing a proper hero. Then the women were asked which type of man they would prefer for a relationship.

As predicted by the cad-dad theory of human mating strategies, the women preferred the proper heroes for long-term unions. When asked which character they would like to see their future daughters choose, they also selected proper heroes. But when asked who appealed to them most for short-term affairs, the women turned to the dark heroes — the handsome, passionate and daring cads.

"These 21st-century female college students could understand mating strategies intuitively," even when they were described in dated language, said Dr. Daniel J. Kruger, a social psychologist at the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research, who led the study. It is published in the fall 2003 issue of the journal *Human Nature*.

Finding a dichotomy between the two male types in Romantic novels two centuries old informs both evolutionary science and literary studies, Dr. Kruger said. It demonstrates that the distinction between long-term and short-term mating strategies is instinctive, and it gives literary scholars a new way of examining old writings.

Men and women, playing off each other, use long- and short-term thinking, and sometimes a mixture, in picking partners, Dr. Kruger said. Women recognize the kind of men who pursue short-term affairs, he said. They fit the description of George Staunton in Scott's "The Heart of Midlothian," who is handsome, daring and "unconstrained," and who displays "the abrupt

demeanor, the occasionally harsh, yet studiously subdued tone of voice." Such dark heroes in Romantic literature, Dr. Kruger said, are typically single and promiscuous.

The title character of "Waverley" illustrates the dad. Waverley is in the army but shows little interest in adventure. One friend says of him, "I will tell you where he will be at home and in his place — in the quiet circle of domestic happiness, lettered indolence and elegant enjoyments of his family's estate." These proper heroes are typically kind and altruistic and prone to tender emotions, like love and melancholy.

Cad and dad strategies are both adaptive, from an evolutionary perspective, Dr. Kruger said. The cad approach enables a man to father many children, while the dad approach ensures the children a man has will thrive.

Women get an obvious payoff from pursuing a long-term relationship: help in rearing children. But they also benefit from brief flings, said Patricia Draper, a professor of anthropology at the University of Nebraska who in the 1980's was among the early scientists to describe the cad-dad split. Women may not be as free as men to opt out of their parental duties, but they still can have more than one sexual partner, Ms. Draper said, and that allows them to mix genes with sexually appealing cads.

"In some societies where there is little male investment in parenting, a women's best strategy may be to find the biggest, toughest, most attractive fellow out there," Ms. Draper said. That way, a woman may end up with a "sexy son" who, in turn, will successfully mate and have children.

Women may also gain material advantages from short-term relationships, said Dr. Henry Harpending, an anthropologist at the University of Utah who has written papers on the topic with Ms. Draper. "The sexy son notion is plausible," he said, "but what females may also get from a short-term affair is a new pair of shoes."

That both men and women have the inclination to engage in short-term flings indicates how adaptive the behavior is, Ms. Draper said, because men and women are very sensitive to infidelity. "Men kill women who are unfaithful," Ms. Draper said. And, she said, "women are sometimes driven to murderous rage, too," citing the Greek tragedy of Medea, who becomes enraged at Jason's infidelity and slaughters their children.

Evolutionary theorists see parallels between the human situation and that of other species, when the male and female parents take care of the offspring. Female warblers, robins and bluebirds, for example, engage in what scientists call "extra-pair copulations," so that in many cases the nestlings' biological fathers are not the mothers' parent partners, said Dr. David Barash, a zoologist at the University of Washington who has studied the mating behavior of mountain bluebirds.

Some evidence suggests that when female birds engage in extra-pair copulations, their choice of male is based on the bird's sexual attractiveness, Dr. Barash said. Female bluethroats, a Eurasian species, for example, will have sex with males whose throats are an especially iridescent shade of blue. And female barn swallows are drawn to males whose tail feathers are deeply forked.

Those barn swallows with appealing tail cleavage also tend to be less attentive as fathers than

other males, Dr. Barash said. "The payoff, to a female, of producing sexy sons, via a cad, makes up for the cost of being stuck with a comparatively deadbeat dad," he said.

Such females, if they are found out, pay a high price for their infidelity, Dr. Barash said. "If a male bird encounters his female in close proximity to another male at the time of breeding, almost inevitably what happens is that the male stops paying child support, essentially. He'll stop investing in the offspring," Dr. Barash said.

But if they can get away with it, these females gain the advantage of mixing their genes with those of highly adaptive males, he said. "The optimum reproductive strategy for females seems to have been and still is to mate with a male who will invest in your offspring, but keep your eyes open for one whose genes will interact well with your own," Dr. Barash said.

The concept of short-term and long-term mating strategies in humans is nothing new, as 19th-century literature attests.

"Bodice rippers, for centuries, have made a profit off this sort of distinction," said Dr. Marlene Zuk, a biology professor at the University of California at Riverside. "Nice guys have been complaining that women don't want to have sex with them for a long time. We've heard this."

She questioned whether it was scientifically useful to identify the cad and dad types in literature.

"Looking at literature isn't going to let us advance evolutionary theory," Dr. Zuk said. "You're just describing what you're seeing. You're not testing a hypothesis."

Dr. Joseph Carroll, an English professor at the University of Missouri at St. Louis and a proponent of Darwinian literary analysis, argued that the study of Scott's heroes goes beyond confirming the cad-dad mating strategy. "It illuminates it and illustrates it," he said. "It gives you a more subtle and nuanced feel for the whole thing."

Dr. E. Mavis Hetherington, emeritus professor of psychology at the University of North Carolina, who studies contemporary marriage and divorce, said the study affirmed what was already known.

"Are you surprised that women are attracted to cads?" she asked. "You wouldn't go out of your way to marry a cad, but if you had a little fling with him, it might be fun and exciting. He's probably a sensation-seeker, so you'd be going off to Mexico or going on ski trips or going to watch the bulls run at Pamplona."

But affairs can be disruptive. "Women are much more cautious than men about getting involved in them," Dr. Hetherington said. "And when they do, it's much more likely to lead to the breakup of a marriage."