

Adjustment and maladjustment

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I could offer him something in the way of security, and might begin to like the idea. But whether it is really love or lust between us, I'm utterly confused in my own mind about that now.

Still, after all I'm a realist. So I don't mind admitting to you that in the back pocket of my slacks at the moment there repose two crisp new five-pound notes. Just in case. He's so breathtakingly desirable.

Adjustment and Maladjustment

We ventured to dip a shy toe into Freudian waters in our piece on the subject of Rejection. A reader who recently asked a stranger up for the traditional cup of coffee and discovered he was entertaining an analyst unawares, has informed us that his bed guest remarked before leaving that he was remarkably well-adjusted—for an invert.

This gave us literary pause and we decided to try a bit of furtive analysis as to the effect of adjustment and maladjustment in various individuals upon their success or failure in the *boîtes de passe* de Manhattan.

A trained eye, one suspects, could almost spot into which category a given cat belonged upon his first entrance into the little den of iniquity. The manner of walking (free or tight), the expression of the face (open or closed) the attitude to the bartender, above all, the extroverted or introverted look with which he meets the eyes of his nearest of sexual kin—all may betray whether he be a liberated soul or an imprisoned one.

The maladjusted queen—dare we make a guess?—is filled with a sense of guilt which makes him reject an approach which is too free, easy and rapid. He needs to feel that his *compagnon de la chasse* is just as guilt-ridden as he is, and can only draw near the \$ 64,000 question by means of an involved hesitant prelude on the subject of the weather, the news, the current book, the latest films, the state of the theatre or, even, per adventure, the baseball season.

All this preliminary reconnoitering is required to reassure the true maladjusted invert that he is in the presence of someone as subtle and circumspect as himself. He is too often, poor thing, like a golden-winged warbler who will mate only with another golden-winged warbler, lest he commit the error of mating with a blue-winged warbler and producing the hybrid called a Brewster's Warbler. (Brewster, *ça va sans dire*, was as gay as a Christmas Tree). He may subconsciously long for such a rash experience as to mate not only with a blue-winged warbler, but even perhaps with a butcher bird—but his guilt will cause him to repel anyone who is too contrasted a type and who approaches him in too direct, blunt and frank a manner. One genteel maladjusted invert, dressed in becoming seersucker, is reported to have had a stroke in the Annex, when a muscle man with tattooed arms and blue jeans who had somehow got in there by mistake walked up to him and said, «Hey, wanna get laid?»

If, however, two such tender warblers, each equally miserable, do miraculously manage to go home together, the inhibited host really will produce the night-cap or the cup of coffee which has provided the subterfuge of invitation . . . and a further half or three quarters of an hour of circuitously feline approach may transpire before he has the audacity to lay hands upon his delicate prey.

At this moment an abrupt and violent change of pace can occur. The fearful, guilty, repressed souls may all at once turn into two hungry, yearning gasp-

ing, lonely cats, clutching at each other, in a manner they will describe later by saying, «Then all hell broke loose». This occurs because the maladjusted ones, with all their repressions of pride, fear and vanity, have been starved for sex for days, weeks, even longer, and, having at last succeeded in locating a bedmate, cannot attain the great fulfillment easily, but only in a sort of spasm of anguish.

If the companion he has lured into his tortured web is another golden winged warbler like himself, they are quite capable of lacerating each other in the most sensitive sado-masochistic style, since neither one will have any sense of humour about his own pressures. They will probably, after having had sex, spend an hour discussing each other's analysts, until they get bored and feel strong enough to do it again. Sometimes a relatively permanent «marriage» can result, though perhaps just out of curiosity to see how each other's analyses progress. Each has sought so long and so futilely for someone to love that he may be willing to make lenient allowances for the other's tantrums out of a desperate urge for a little period of sexual continuity. But if they are equally crippled by maladjustment, the chances are the affair is blighted, for then neither one will have enough objectivity, humour or sense of security to take the responsibility for managing the affair smoothly, and it will therefore soon reach a bitter end. They will then go back to the bars again, more unapproachable and inhibited than before, and try to drown the pain of it all in a progression of Gibsons. There will also be an increased tendency to be bitchy with their friends.

The maladjusted person, either before or after such an episode, can usually be spotted in a bar by his rigidity and his mesmerized stance. He either sits on a bar stool, clutching his drink for company, and allowing his eyes to meet no one's but the bartender's and his own eyes in the mirror; or else he stands against the wall, silent and decorative, like a plaster slave holding up a gas lamp. If addressed, he may completely refuse to reply. He has tied himself into a Gordian knot of rejectionitis and is drawing his breath with pain in this cruel world; he cannot assert himself, he can only wait in passionate pettishness for some Alexander to descend from the clouds and free him with one stroke of the . . . well, let us say, the shaft.

The maladjusted person is likely to be masochistically drawn to precisely those gay bars where it will be the hardest for him to get on relaxed terms with others. He will seek out bars where there is a «club» from which he is beautifully excluded. A more casual, amiable atmosphere, such as he might find on the upper West Side, seems to alarm and repel him. The aura of painful sexual disappointment in which he prefers to live is not as acutely present there, and this embarrasses him. He *needs* to be in a bar where he can stand safely in happy wretchedness for hours, watching other, giddier queens chat giddily to each other, suffering because he is not a member of the «in group» and clutching his maladjusted beer to one thigh.

For such precious people we have only one cure to propose—a drastic one. It is not a change of wardrobe. It is not a change of «blocking». It is not even a change of bars. It is simply Rape.

These thwarted souls are the ones who often turn out to have obsessive mother images somewhere in the background. Mother is standing beside her dear boy still, reproaching him for having betrayed her by being in this foul den of desire at all, and inhibiting him from reaching out for the very thing he has come to seek. These starved souls are beyond the help of simple friendliness.

It does not free them or disarm; it causes them to freeze up or to flee in fright.

These sad sacks do accidentally stray into happy-go-lucky bars, out of ignorance, but with time and experience they will gravitate to the places where they are in the majority and join the other recruits to *Les Misérables*.

In judging them, it should be remembered that they regard themselves as aesthetic and as idyll-seekers. They wish they had lived in the ancient Greece of «*The Last of the Wine*» or the ancient Rome of «*Hadrian's Memoirs*». Secretly, they cast themselves as «beautiful Alexias» in the former, and as hapless Antinous in the latter. The former is the more correct casting, since few of them would be attracted, as Antinous was, to a strong man, a father-image mature man like Hadrian, and be prepared to devote their hearts to him. An older man as disciplined, as stalwart and as integrated as Hadrian would scare them stiff.

Some of «*Les Misérables*» are so rarefied they will not risk entering a gay bar alone. They prefer to wait for someone to meet them socially in an ordinary way and touch them with sudden joy. It is impossible to reason with them and point out that practical statistics reveal their modus operandi is without a high rate of success; they scorn practicality and prefer to be martyrs who nightly pile the faggots around their own cold feet and set fire to themselves to endure dramatic scenes of Immolation.

When they are lured into the sack by someone not identical with themselves, they are capable of groaning and moaning with heartsick fervour, «Do you love me?» Or else of talking about Mother—God save the mark! All this to some simple, uncomplicated character who just wanted to get laid.

Whether it is worth spending the amount of time and money requisite for an evening of storming the ramparts of one of these enchained Andromedas, is a moot point. It might be simpler just to swim the Hellespont. Perhaps these dismal spirits appeal only to two kinds of bedmates: the maternal and the sadistic. In any case, they should always be left while night's candles are still burning, for in the morning they can be ghosts haunted by the furies, or else they must hurry romantically away to the ribbon counter at Bloomingdale's department store.

The maladjusted person is very much inclined to fool himself into thinking he is frightfully selective, whereas, actually, once he were liberated from his chains, he would accept far more lovers than he does, and lovers of quite a different type.

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The adjusted person is, it must be confessed, much more of a fun story. He usually has been «out» a long time and no longer regards homosexuality as a desperate problem. To him it is not a matter of Secchi's «*Love Me Or Not, Love Her I Must Or Die . . .*» but rather an attitude which is crudely expressed by the frank thusly, «When I want to get laid, I want to get laid. I don't have to have Horst Buchholz before I'll say 'Yes' and I don't have to be wooed with gewgaws.» All adjusted faggots are not as blunt and basic as this, but they are not to be termed invertes in the sense of being turned in on themselves.

Their very expression as they enter a bar will show their degree of adjustment. Even if they recognize no one there but the bartender, the look of their faces will not be taut and covered, but casual and easy-going. They will glance about with open sunny eyes rather than with secretive, persecuted eyes. They are prepared to make out or not to make out, but if they fail, they aren't going to be mortally wounded for a week. Of course, they do not like being turned

down and disappointed any more than a maladjusted person does, but they are better conditioned to accept with equanimity the percentage of times this is bound to occur, through no particular fault of technique on their part.

To the maladjusted person, the adjusted person is an object of both envy and scorn. He envies the relative ease with which this happier dispositioned spirit opens conversations with strangers, and makes himself at home, instead of remaining imprisoned in his own lonely cubicle. On the other hand, if he should settle for someone whom the maladjusted person would repudiate as a bedmate, then he will feel scorn and probably decide, just some promiscuous harlot. I'd rather be lonely than not fulfill my claims on the ideal.

The maladjusted person is entitled to retain his own specifications; it is only that when he is already so inhibited, they reduce his already shrunken chances of success; for he is then likely to reject as unworthy what offers he does receive. He has never learned the value of the old expression, «He took love where he found it.» Sometimes he will outgrow this limitation; sometimes never. His quantitative inexperience has prevented him from learning that you can't judge a lay by his looks.

The adjusted person is adjusted precisely because he has learned a more catholic view of men as lovers. He has enough practical sense not to be looking only for a great love. A great love may come once in a lifetime, if even then, and meanwhile, what is one to do with one's libido?

We do not wish to give our readers the notion that the adjusted person we have outlined has no pride and no vanity. He has both, but he has learned to discipline them in the interests of a healthily regular sex life. He has adjusted both these psychological factors to the frequency of rebuff and he has learned how to cope with this and not become a nervous mass of wounded pride and stabbed vanity. In short, he realizes that a humorous acceptance of the long odds of luck in gay life will not only increase his chances for success, but make him last longer as a sex object. Naturally, all the same, there are occasions he finds bitter, and there are periods when the whole business temporarily disgusts him. In the main, though, he is able to say about most things which befall, «Oh, what the hell!» The maladjusted person cannot do this.

In summary, which one makes the better bedmate: the adjusted or the maladjusted person? All other things being equal, we would say the former does. He is going to be a better friend to you in bed. With him you may not have the most sensational, bowel-shattering spasm of lust you ever knew, but the adjusted person will also be more patient with you if you are slow in catching the train, more tolerant if you can't catch it, and will send you away in harmony and not in reproach. This is because to him sexual intercourse is not an occasion of sin, but an occasion of comfort.

Of course, we know a true neurotic does not want comfort and joy; he wants torment and tension, and for him an adjusted partner may not be gratifying; but for the average homosexual, we are willing to guess that he will be better rewarded by going home with that goodnatured guy who has a smile in his eyes than with some arrogant beauty who has a sensual, spoiled mouth. It is possible for the former to turn out to be something of more lasting value than a temporary lay; he might prove to be a lasting friend.

by **Hadrian**

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