Smokers for Celibacy*

Fleur Adcock

Some of us are a little tired of hearing that cigarettes kill.
We’d like to warn you about another way of making yourself ill:

we suggest that in view of AIDS, herpes, chlamydia, cystitis and NSU,
not to mention genital warts and cervical cancer and the proven connection
between the two,

if you want to avoid turning into physical wrecks
what you should give up is not smoking but sex.

We’re sorry if you’re upset,
but think of the grisly things you might otherwise get.

We can’t see much point in avoiding emphysema at sixty-five
if that’s an age at which you have conspicuously failed to arrive;

and as for cancer, it is a depressing fact
that at least for women this disease is more likely to occur in the reproductive
tract.

We could name friends of ours who died that way, if you insist,
but we feel sure you can each provide your own list.

You’ll notice we didn’t mention syphilis and gonorrhoea;
well, we have now, so don’t get the idea

that just because of antibiotics quaint old clap and pox
are not still being generously spread around by men’s cocks.

Some of us aren’t too keen on the thought of micro-organisms travelling up
into our brain
and giving us General Paralysis of the Insane.

We’re opting out of one-night stands;
we’d rather have a cigarette in our hands.

If it’s a choice between two objects of cylindrical shape
we go for the one that is seldom if ever guilty of rape.

Cigarettes just lie there quietly in their packs
waiting until you call on one of them to help you relax.

They aren’t moody; they don’t go in for sexual harassment and threats,
or worry about their performance as compared with that of other cigarettes,
nor do they keep you awake all night telling you the story of their life,
beginning with their mother and going on until morning about their first wife.

Above all, the residues they leave in your system are thoroughly sterilised and
clean,
which is more than can be said for the products of the human machine.

Altogether, we’ve come to the conclusion that sex is a drag,
Just give us a fag.