

Vulgarity

by XXXX

My friend and I were at a cafe—as distinct from a coffee shop, which had locations, and well-paid staff, and clean floors—and there was this short lull, as conversations typically have, especially when you are speaking with someone you know and care about, and suddenly she blurts out: “You are vulgar.” There is actually no perfect translation to it. “Bastos ka.” She meant I was vulgar, but also disgusting, distasteful, offensive, rude, salacious, obnoxious...

Filipino culture is a very modest culture, based upon the rules of two masters, Colonial and Divine. After all these years of freedom from the Spanish, Japanese, and Americans, we have changed little. “Penis,” for example, is more acceptable than the proper Filipino word, “Titi,” and “Vagina” replaces the proper Tagalog term, “Pekpek,” both of which sound comical to the non-Filipino ear, and sometimes comical even to the ears of the petit bourgeois degenerates of Metro Manila. Though we use “pekpek” without malice to describe shorts that are immodestly close to the vagina. Some simply prefer the more vulgar, but paradoxically more acceptable, “puke,” pronounced pu-ke.

The crowning vulgarity, however, is the word for sex, which is “kantot.” This word is never politely used and almost never used even frankly. We use “pagtatalik,” which is more like being affectionate, but is used as a euphemism so frequently that it is obviously a euphemism, or simply use “sex.” “Kantot” is so disgusting that one can only use it ironically. This is also why “puke” is more acceptable than the frank, direct “pekpek.” Puke is an expletive and is thus always used with irony.

So, she said: “Bastos ka.” She was referring, probably, to my poems, but could have been but the straw that broke the camel's back, because even before I have been vulgar to an extent most people

can only imagine. The revelation, really, is sincerity. People can laugh all they like at wanton sexuality, at the joke of promiscuity and the frankness of sexual intercourse, but when you actually attempt to address it as actual fact, as real-world phenomenon, when you try to rub out the abstract as you would a foggy window with your sleeve and bring out the particulars, people cannot take it. I refuse to be ironic about it.

My friends are accustomed to this, and are advocates of the same mentality with regard to sexuality, along with any other human frailty—because sexuality is a human flaw, the way it seeps at every aspect of social existence, regardless of its function, and because of sex many lives have been ruined, or at the very least time and money wasted. Sex fascinates me not because it is magical, or exhilarating, or very, very fun (though, of course, these are true) but because it is somewhat of a human evolutionary flaw, and proof that we are, at most, animals walking on two legs playing dress up.

In any case: “Bastos ka.” She was serious. She was almost angry but she knew very well she had no right to be angry about anything. The sky was overcast. The coffee was magnificent and the avenue on which the establishment was situated was very quiet, an upscale neighborhood with large houses.

I said, “Blow me.” There is no proper way to translate what I really said. “Pachupa.” She was very unhappy about it, but then she laughed. There was really something funny about it. I was being ironic, of course. She was a lady, and had no interest in her body. Yet, sexuality, for all its vulgarity, is also very funny, and sometimes the idea of fucking is like the idea of a dog being completely unable to fathom that the other dog in the mirror is him.

Vulgarity, for me, is an expression of massive pessimism. I am, to put it simply, a massive pessimist, a believer in the cruel and stupid animality, savagery of humanity. The human's capacity for

intelligence, introspection, and invention only create a more dangerous beast, never a more beautiful one. Most of all, I believe in the insignificance of the human person, of the philosophical subject, of the soul itself. It is frivolous, frequently inflated out of proportion, just as we have a habit of doing to sex—yet, just like sex, we must enjoy our humanity anyway, for it seduces us, causes us pleasures that, before and after the act itself, are incalculable and mysterious.

